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"... fears about social degeneracy " (say the optimists) " need not disturb us, because such fears have been expressed in every age . . . Of course, it is quite true that this notion of the decline of a state has been suggested in many periods, by many persons . . . Thus, for instance, Byron, notoriously so moody and melodramatic, had somehow or other got it into his head that the Isles of Greece were less glorious in arts and arms in the last days of Turkish rule than in the days of the Battle of Salamis or the Republic of Plato So again Wordsworth, in an equally sentimental fashion, seems to insinuate that the Republic of Venice was not quite so powerful when Napoleon trod it out like a dying ember as when its commerce and art filled the seas of the world with a conflagration of colour So many writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have even gone so far as to suggest that modern Spain played a less predominant part than Spain in the days of the discovery of America or the victory of Lepanto Some, even more lacking in that Optimism which is the soul of commerce, have made an equally perverse comparison between the earlier and the later conditions of the commercial aristocracy of Holland Some have even maintained that Tyre and Sidon are not quite so fashionable as they used to be, and somebody once said something about 'the ruins of Carthage' "

G K CHESTERTON

“The first line of a country's defence and of the defence of civilisation is solvency. We have got into a position where many can only pay rates and taxes by realising assets, and so diminishing the funds needed for the expansion of business. If this goes on, our whole social and industrial fabric will go to pieces, and the country, instead of being a land fit for heroes to live in, will be peopled by paupers.”

LORD INCHCAPE.

## PREFACE

*These pages are written in the hope that they may help a certain number of people to discover a way out of the darkness which is now fast deepening over our national life " . . . The outlook of the British people," writes an American observer, " seems dark and uncertain We all have perplexities in this time, but the troubles that beset the British are large and concern things fundamental. Their greatest days are probably past On the whole, I look for no large immediate catastrophe, no sudden downfall, though these may indeed come, but I fear that a long, slow decline has begun "*

*" I was speaking only two days ago," said Mr Philip Snowden in March of the present year, " to one of the greatest captains of industry in the North, and he said he expected that within two years every factory in Great Britain would be closed down."*

*That we are drifting towards a crisis of*

serious magnitude is plain to those who have eyes to see anything more than the flippancies and fripperies of social existence, indeed, I know some men of my acquaintance who, having dispassionately studied all the facts involved in our situation, believe that we cannot now avert catastrophe in one form or another, so far gone are we already on the way to moral and economic collapse.

But the manner in which we bear ourselves under the catastrophe, whatever its nature or its duration, is a matter of first-rate importance, for no catastrophe in human affairs entirely annihilates a people. It leaves them either able or broken, either hoping or despairing, either still conscious of power and willing once more to exert great strength, or craven, discredited, and for ever fallen.

In order to see how we should conduct ourselves in the difficult days ahead, let us first ask ourselves how it is that such disastrous evil has so suddenly befallen us. In my own memory we were incomparably the most enviable of all the nations of the earth, famous not only for our energy but for our practical good sense, rich in spiritual power, and rich, comfortably rich, in material power. How

*is it that so suddenly we have come to the edge of an abyss, and that other nations are even beginning to number our days as a mighty empire?*

*The answer to this question is probably a simple one. There is a chaos in our ways because there is a chaos in our minds. There is disorder in our house of life because there is disorder in our souls. We can no more hope to shape a great destiny out of our present way of thinking than a child with spade and bucket can think to build a stone house out of sand. Our thoughts are our chastisement. If we let them, they will become our destruction.*

*So long as we are thinking stupidly our national life will stand in peril; and so long as we are not thinking sanely, vigorously, and with a stern sense of individual responsibility, we must inevitably drift towards disaster. For fallacies are as fatal to men and nations as error of any kind to the mathematician and the engineer. In other words, we are blundering existence for want of a thesis.*

*Let us be quite clear that it is nothing outside of us which is working England this*

great mischief, but only the sloth of our own undutiful and impudent souls. By our own conduct, which is the expression of our inward and spiritual life, we are inviting Nemesis to slay us, for we are acting as if the universe were governed by no laws of any kind, acting not only as if it were possible and reasonable to gather grapes from thistles and figs from thorns, but as if the Invisible Powers behind the plain processes of evolution had a taste for tomfoolery and a positive passion for the second-rate

If in our present mood we are caught by calamity we shall surely be destroyed, and a more intelligent, a more serious, and a more disciplined people will take our place at the head of European civilisation. But if before calamity has brought our house to ruin we can recover our intelligence and restore our conscience, then we may so handle calamity that something rocklike will be left behind on which our children, bitterly paying the price of our infidelity, may build a better house for their anxious posterity.

To this end, if only for our own safety's sake, let us quietly confront the facts of our situation, studying them as earnestly and intelligently as a seaman studies a threatening

*sky, and then vigorously ask ourselves whether we cannot find in the wisdom of our ancestors and in the whisperings of our own conscience that piece of knowledge which may save us from destruction*



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"Better will it be for us to gird up our loins for a final effort to achieve our salvation, and meanwhile with clear vision to watch the gathering clouds, to discern the shadowy hand even now growing palpable from the thin air, the damnatory finger tracing upon the wall its 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN,' warning us that we and our civilisation have been tried in the balance and found wanting "

AUSTIN FREEMAN, *Social Decay and Regeneration*

## I

NOTHING in our national situation is more patent and indisputable than its vulnerability. I can think of no great empire in the past whose centre was more naked to destruction, or of any nation at the present time, not even Poland, whose existence lies more exposed to obvious danger.

This fact, our extreme vulnerability, is central to the thesis I wish to develop, and I beg the reader to consider it with real thoroughness, for it is only by apprehension and conviction of this central fact that he will be able to understand the nature of the danger which now threatens us.

Our island provides us with a fifth of our most vital necessities in the shape of food. Without the four-fifths which reach these shores from foreign countries we should starve. We have sacrificed our agriculture to our industries, and the more our population has increased the more hardly have we

borne upon the farmer, until at the present moment his position is little better than that of a man living on the dole.

British agriculture, then, cannot be regarded as an insurance of our national existence. It has become to us little more than a hobby. Our countryside, it may be said, is the backyard of our industrialism or the suburban garden of our imperial grandeur. Few would seriously reckon it as a necessity of our existence. Very much do I doubt whether a body of working men could be brought together in any of our great manufacturing cities to listen to a speech on the subject of British agriculture. Nor is there evidence at the present time that our Cabinet Ministers are more interested in the subject than are the inhabitants of Manchester, Newcastle, and Sheffield.

Obviously, then, a nation which cannot feed itself is in grave peril of destruction. It lives, and must live, on the hazard of other men's labour. For no considerable length of time can it ever be sure of the means of existence. An accident, such as the accident of war, might reduce it in a week or two to a state of starvation. With

nothing to fall back upon in its own fields, it would be caught like a rat in a trap, powerless to escape from certain death. This, I say, is obvious. A child can see it with very little strain of thinking.

But do we really see, as the central fact of our national existence, that we are dependent on countries overseas for the means of life? I do not think so, for a reason which I will presently state. On the contrary, it appears to me that we are living in complete oblivion of this fact, and that we have no more anxiety about our foreign food supplies than we have for our supply of water, and no more fear of starvation than we have of suffocation.

Consider, first of all, how we obtain these supplies of food from foreign countries. They are not sent to us because the foreigner loves us. They do not arrive in our harbours as the rain descends upon our fields. They are marked with a price, and they are bought, against the competition of other nations, by the boldness of our enterprise, the diligence of our labour, and the soundness of our financial strength.

Eighty per cent of our most vital necessities, without which we should perish of

starvation, are brought to these shores from far across the sea in exchange for the fruits of British labour. Let our supply of manufactured goods fail in quality or quantity, or let their price become too high for the foreigner's pocket, and our supplies of food would dwindle, our whole national life would be paralysed, and we should live in the shadow of famine till the end came.

Now, if this, too, is so obvious that a child can understand it without effort, might we not reasonably expect to find in our nation, as the governing principle of its economic life, a tremendous earnestness concerning its foreign trade? Is it unreasonable to suppose that a nation so vulnerable to destruction should be of one mind in this particular matter, however greatly it might differ about things of less vital concernment?

We might expect, for example, that every Chancellor of the Exchequer in framing his budget would, as a first consideration, see that no impost should be levied upon the manufacturers of the country which might imperil their successful competition in the markets whence we draw our vital food supplies, and we might also expect that

every leader of Labour in addressing the workpeople of the country would impress upon them, also as a first consideration, that no demand on their part for higher wages or shorter hours can be economically permissible which in any way threatens our imports of food by raising the price of our exports of manufactured goods

We might, I think, even expect that the first consideration of a Government would be to help our manufacturers in every possible way to defeat the competition of our rivals, as the highly intelligent German Government has always done for their manufacturers, with no such urgent and vital necessity as exists in our case, and we might also expect that the first consideration of Labour politics would be so to organise the working classes that no other nation should be able to compare with ours for swiftness of output, sound workmanship, and economic efficiency.

But instead of this reasonable spirit on the part of the Government and the leaders of Labour we find, on the contrary, that both of them act in such a way as not merely to imperil our foreign trade but to render

it an easy prey to the competition of our rivals. The Government loads the manufacturer with taxes, permits local authorities to load him still further with rates, and hampers him in every conceivable way by restrictions which may be admirable from a humanitarian point of view and yet entirely suicidal from an economic point of view. And while the Government is thus raising to a disastrous height the price of the goods which the British manufacturer must sell against foreign competition if we are to draw 80 per cent of our vital necessities in food from abroad, the leaders of Labour pursue a policy of annoyance, hindrance, and even actual and declared antagonism, which still further raises that price of his goods, till he is beaten by every rival nation which cares to challenge him.

Before the war our home exports were some £160,000,000 less than our foreign imports, they are now some £350,000,000 less than those imports. The balance is going steadily against us, we cannot now even build ships for our own use at an economic price, and the time cannot be far, if the present spirit continue to exist, when our food supplies will lessen, the cost



of living mount sky-high, and starvation open the door to the violence and chaos of revolution.

If we cannot pay for our food, we shall not receive it. The chief and only safe way in which we can procure that food is by sending our manufactured goods to those who grow it. And in order that our manufactured goods should be more desirable in the eyes of those who grow it, they must be good, cheap, and unchecked in their flow—better, cheaper, and more regular than those of competing nations.

There in a nutshell is our economic condition, and that economic condition is absolutely central to our whole national existence. Until we accept it as the first postulate of our political thinking, we shall continue to think with a stupidity which will first cripple and then, and very swiftly, destroy us. I set down this thought in my first chapter because, although I shall presently proceed to discuss moral questions, it is foundational to the existence of modern England. Our religion, our philosophy, our arts, our social existence, and our domestic life, all of them are governed by this foun-

dational factor of our economic situation—our dependence on countries overseas for 80 per cent of our most elementary necessities. Until we realise this truth with the full intelligence of sane and practical men, we are like a traveller who goes into the desert with no food, and like a sailor who attempts to cross the sea with neither chart nor compass. Indeed, our conduct is even more absurd, for while the traveller may fall among friends, we can fall upon nothing but starvation, and while the seaman may reach some port or another, we can reach nothing but destruction.

Let the reader apprehend this central truth of our economic condition, and he will find no reason in the pages that follow for dismissing me as an alarmist. Let him continue to think that somehow or another we shall always be able to draw an adequate supply of food from abroad, however greatly our population may increase, and he will find in these pages nothing but the vapourings of a nervous mind.

## II

MANY people in England, probably the great bulk of the nation, believe that we need never fear the industrial rivalry of other countries because there is some quality in English character which places us head and shoulders above all other people.

This fallacy has its rise in the astonishing truth that islands so small as ours have played a paramount part in the late history of the world, and have become the centre of an imperial system markedly greater than that of any empire in past times. It is not until we examine the origin of this greatness that we perceive how precarious is our present place in the world and how threatening the skies which obscure our immediate future

At the beginning of the nineteenth century we were a nation of under nine million people. Europe at that time was emerging from a revolutionary chaos. England's

democracy was still sobered by a great religious preoccupation, the work of John Wesley, and her aristocracy, never reconciled to a Hanoverian Court, was mainly devoted to husbandry, stockbreeding, and country sports. The German Empire had no existence. The United States were in much the same colonial condition as our own dependencies. The rest of the nations of the earth were composed of peasants.

Sober, earnest, and peaceful England continued along the road of industrialism which she had been the first to discover in the closing years of the eighteenth century, and with a swiftness which revolutionised her ways she now began to manufacture all manner of goods for other nations. The intelligence of the people was concentrated on invention, and the maker of machines became the pioneer of a new civilisation. We were the first nation to perceive the importance of this step, and the only nation in the world to sacrifice its ancient agriculture to an entirely new economic existence. Long before a rival appeared upon the scene, or any nation had even thought of following our example, we had become the manufacturers for all mankind and these small

islands had grown to be the financial centre of the world

That moral qualities played some part in this victorious innovation of the English people no one is likely to question, but beyond all doubt the main element of our success was a long start of other nations. Moral qualities came in, just as our natural wealth in the shape of coal and iron came in, as contributory factors, but the ease with which we achieved an industrial primacy among the nations was chiefly the consequence of a long start. At the moment when mechanism was beginning to change the face of human existence, England, isolated from a continent still quivering from the throes of revolution and still bleeding from the wounds inflicted by interminable wars, found herself free to concentrate on new ideas, and rich enough to endow them with the capital necessary for their immediate development. She had a start, and a long start, of all the nations of the earth

Thus it came about that England was without a rival in the world for wealth, power, and factory experience up to the

middle years of the nineteenth century After 1850, with a population of nearly eighteen million people, the rivalry she had to meet was practically of a negligible quality, and in triumph she pursued her easy and victorious way for nearly another fifty years But during those last fifty years of the century the petty states of Germany were first welded into an empire and then gradually developed by autocratic power into a vast industrial machine Further, the United States of America had built up from the solid basis of an incomparable agriculture an industrialism characterised by a brilliance of invention almost unknown in Europe Before the century had reached its close, England was aware of stern competition in many markets which she had come to regard almost as her own properties; and from that time onward she has had to fight, and to fight hard, for her industrial existence

It was during the first shock of this foreign competition that certain observers in Germany began to criticise our nation, against which their country had never once fought and for which it had ever entertained an admiration which was unenvious and

even affectionate. These German observers began first of all to question our intelligence. Were we such wonderful people after all? Their manufacturers announced that they had no fear of us. Even with all our vast advantages they believed that their superior intelligence and greater industry would defeat us in the markets of the world. We had now ceased to invent machinery. The looms in Lancashire were almost as old as Arkwright and James Watt. The plant in our engineering workshops came from America. We were no longer the serious people of fifty years back. At the first challenge to our industrial supremacy we had lost ground, and ever since that challenge they, the German manufacturers, had gained ground more and more.

Then these observers considered the use we were making of our univalued advantages. Was there any sign of intelligence in England's attitude to her colonies? Was she using those young countries as Germany would have used them? Was there any evidence that she even perceived the advantage of unifying this huge empire into one solid economic state independent of all other nations? Had not some of her states-

men even lamented that she possessed any colonies at all ? Had not a leader of English political thought wished India at the devil—the India without which Lancashire must perish ?

Then they turned their attention to the heart of this mystery—our moral life—our attitude towards education, our literature, our art, and our science. They decided that we were conducting ourselves like a rich parvenu, that we despised education, that we had no feeling for architecture, that everything great, strong, and beautiful in English life belonged to the past, the past in which we had had no rivals, and that now we were careless, vulgar, and stupid, our architecture a desecration of our countryside, our system of education beneath contempt, our literature unwholesome and decadent, our art thin and affected, our science second-hand and shallow, our philosophy—it had ceased to exist.

They read a brilliant American's description of our common people—"people who bear the distinctive stamp of that physical and mental degradation which comes from the slums . . . pallid, stunted, mis-



begotten, and in every way miserable figures." They read, too, the affrighting description of our dark cities and their hungry inhabitants in a book which brought the desperate efforts of the Salvation Army into a momentary prominence Millions of the proud English living like dogs ! Millions of the great English half-starved and ragged ! Millions of the people in whose hands were the fate of India, Egypt, Canada, Australasia, and vast spaces of South Africa, living from hand to mouth, not knowing where the next meal was coming from, and as ignorant of all those things that make the civilised European as any peasant in Korea or any negro in Darkest Africa !

That quality which most struck them in our civilisation was its extreme untidiness, and they considered that just as a dirty house is the effect of a careless housewife, so the extreme untidiness of British civilisation was the effect of a very gross and culpable carelessness on the part of our rulers

The humiliation of the Boer War confirmed the foreign observer in his opinion that our days as a great nation were already

numbered. It was only the Royal Navy which shielded us from a contest that might have dismembered the Empire and reduced us to impotence. Behind that mighty shield, but mighty, like our post industrial supremacy, chiefly because no nation had challenged our sea-power for a hundred years, we fought the long Boer War to an ignominious finish, and found ourselves exhausted and friendless in a world which no longer either admired our intelligence or feared our strength.

Mr. Chamberlain's attempt to co-ordinate the Empire and to protect our foreign trade was easily defeated by the oratorical evasions of Mr. Asquith, and the Prime Minister of the day, a Free Trader who intended to leave things entirely as they were, announced to the world that 12,000,000 of our people were "underfed, on the verge of starvation, doubtful day by day of the sufficiency of their food."

While this was our attitude of mind, the German was intelligently developing not only his industries but his whole national life. Under the regis of monarchy the doctors of humanity in that country were encouraged to develop a form of national

organisation which had all the advantages of socialism with none of its paralysing inhibitions. Discipline and thoroughness were the master-words of German nationalism, and the State existed, not to bleed its industrialists, but to help them with all its non might to conquer the trade of the world. It was the State which kept the workshops of Germany supplied with well-educated, highly disciplined, and earnestly patriotic workpeople, it was the State which subsidised any industry unable of itself to gain a foothold in foreign markets; and it was the State which saw that none of its old workpeople ever came to want and that none of the streets in any of its cities ever decayed into slums.

But for the insolent pride of the Prussian soldier in his army, the nervous impatience of the German statesman for an empire overseas, and a gross form of materialism corrupting the sound judgment and the homely virtues of the German middle-classes, there is no question at all that the German industrialist would have conquered the world by his trade and reduced the people of this country to a very desperate economic condition. But in August 1914

the industrial evolution of mankind was brought to a barbarous cheek, and triumphant Germany found herself hemmed in on every side by the armies of her enemies, while the narrowness of her outlet to the high seas prevented her from making any powerful use of the great Battle Fleet the existence of which had perturbed British statesmen for a decade

After a stubborn defiance of the world for over four years, during which Britain's command of the seas had denied her many of the primal necessities of life, Germany surrendered to the Allies, and settled down within her mutilated borders to reconstruct the ruins of her industrial existence. From the first moment of her new life as a republic it was clear what she intended to do. Behind the politician was the industrial magnate, and it was the industrial magnate, not the politician, to whom Germany looked for a resurrection.

It was seen by the intelligent German people that desperate efforts were needed if their industrial fortunes were not to suffer an eternal eclipse. Their great neighbouring market of Russia was bankrupt, the Balkan States were no longer in a position

fulness England had surrendered to the forces of anarchy in Ireland, was putting into the hands of Indians the power to exclude her manufactures from their ports, and was showing signs of timorous weakness in her dealing with the infantile Egyptians. All the strength of her right arm seemed to have vanished and all the former confidence in her imperial mission to have gone out of her soul. Instead of high intelligence and an unflinching courage in her statesmen, it was difficult to see anything there save humanitarian sentimentalism and a craven fear of being great. If Ireland had been allowed to break away, and her loyalists betrayed, why not India?—that vast empire of which the last great Englishman had said, "The country that holds India rules the world." And in addition to these imperial matters, there was the mind of British Labour to strengthen the German's confidence and to confirm his logic. Who could perceive in that turbulent and wordy mind even the very alphabet of political wisdom, even the very faintest beginnings of a knowledge of its own precarious position?

Three years after the armistice, three years of insensate strikes and the wildest

revolutionary propaganda, the great trade of England was suddenly snapped like a rotten twig. Four millions of people were flung out of employment. Spiders spun their webs on the machinery of Sheffield and Newcastle, and birds built their nests in the roofs of foundries in Middlesbrough and Skinningrove. But for the support of the banks some of the greatest firms in England would have had to wind up their affairs and some of the proudest municipalities in our industrial north to have declared themselves insolvent. Such was the position of this great and victorious country three years after war, and at a moment when the trade of the world was at her feet and her most perilous competitor was without colonies, merchant marine, or a stable government.

To meet the difficulties of the times, the statesmen and the local authorities of England, making no effort of any moment to reduce their own extravagant expenditure, loaded the manufacturer with still heavier rates and taxes, and directed all their energies, not to the assistance of British foreign trade, but to the doping of the unemployed with a dole for idleness.

From that moment the German had no doubt of his ultimate victory. The one rival he had to fear in the markets of the world was clearly without the intelligence of a child. America might one day prove dangerous, Japan was a rival to be respectfully considered, but England was so entirely occupied in committing economic suicide that any German manufacturer with a teaspoonful of brains could steal her markets from under her nose.

Further, the astute German perceived that one of those tremendous accidents which had contributed to the former greatness of England was ceasing every year to be of any considerable count. "To-day we have to reckon with the possibility, happily no more as yet than a possibility," says the *Manchester Guardian*, "that Great Britain has permanently lost some of the natural or acquired advantages which, before the war, made her the greatest trading nation in the world." The future belongs to oil and electricity, and England's rich coalfields must therefore fall more and more into decay. By postponing the payment of his debts, by alternately supplicating and threatening the European Powers, by

adroitly reminding the Americans that Germany is a valuable market for their exports, the German industrialist saw that he could gain time to get upon his feet and to prepare himself for the new age of electrical power.

So it comes about that we find ourselves in England seven years after the armistice with a great army of unemployed, with a burden of unexampled taxation, and with a difference between our exports and imports of some £350,000,000. And during this same period we have spent nearly a like sum, at any rate £300,000,000, on keeping the idle fed and the discontented from mutiny.

Let our foreign rivals defeat us still further in the overseas markets of the world, and our supplies of food will fall, the cost of living will increase, and the hungry millions of this country will demand a revolution that must destroy us all.

It is calculated that in twenty-five years' time our population, if it survive catastrophe in the near future, will have risen to 65,000,000. Is there a statesman in



the country, or a leader of the working classes, who believes that without an entirely new spirit in industry, and an altogether more imaginative organisation of the empire, all these millions can be fed ?

### III

My purpose up to this point will have been achieved if the reader agrees with me on the five following heads

That our economic situation is extremely vulnerable on account of our dependence on countries overseas for 80 per cent of our food ,

That we won our position of industrial supremacy mainly by means of a long start, and not by superior intelligence or nobler moral qualities ;

That directly we were seriously challenged by other nations, particularly the German nation, our national fortunes began to decline ,

That neither our Government nor the leaders of Labour behave as if it were the cardinal principle of their duty to protect and further the foreign trade of this country ;

And finally,

That the alarming fall in our exports, unless rapidly checked, must result in a

diminution of our food supplies, a much higher cost of living, and eventual starvation for at least twenty millions of people

If these statements are accepted, and realised as important truths which touch the very centre of Britain's national existence, we may proceed to examine the state of mind in which our countrymen appear to be confronting a future which is unquestionably dark with menace. But I would once more beg the reader not to lose sight for a moment of the supreme importance of those economic conditions on which our existence as a people absolutely depends, and particularly to convince himself that our industrial supremacy in the last hundred years was much more a matter of luck, that is to say, the accidents of history and geography, than of any superior intelligence on the part of our ancestors.

That they were more seriously minded than the present generation there is little question, that they were more alert to see an opportunity and to take an advantage is also probably true, but it is plain to us that their path to wealth and power was as easy as it was undisputed, and that in taking that path they were in many ways

guilty of neglecting their country's highest interests. They sacrificed the agriculture of the country to the exigencies of industrialism, and they permitted conditions of life in manufacturing cities which were fatal both to the health and morals of the people

If it is foolish of us to believe that some higher wisdom and some nobler ethical endowment in the Englishman sets him sky-high above the people of other nations, so is it equally foolish of us to look backward for enlightenment in our present difficulties. We may, indeed we must, search the records of our ancestors for the fundamental traditions of our national character, but we must also make use of a thousand facts unknown to those ancestors, which science has discovered since their day, and by the use of which we ought to guide our steps towards the future

It is a penalty of looking backward to become dispirited and sentimental, to lose a manful grip on life and to believe that we fulfil our duties as good citizens by lamenting the past and abusing the present. It is only when we look resolutely forward, self-

reliant and minded for strong adventure, measuring our qualities against the prize to be gained, that our creative faculties become athletic and our courage mounts to meet the danger that will always challenge the advance of a nation worthy of greatness

"Here are the greatest names coupled with the greatest crimes, you would spare those criminals, for some mysterious reason I would hang them higher than Haman, for reasons of quite obvious justice, still higher for the sake of historical science

"The inflexible integrity of the moral code is, to me, the secret of the authority, the dignity, the utility of History

"Judge not according to the orthodox standard of a system religious, philosophical, political, but according as things promote, or fail to promote, the delicacy, integrity, and authority of Conscience "

ACTON, in a letter to Bishop Creighton

describe such trials in the courts as "Society" cases

It pointed out that the possession of a title does not in these days confer upon its holder a right to dictate the moral behaviour of society, and that great wealth plays little or no part at all in the counsels of those whose social influence is still considerable. How true this statement is everyone knows who has the smallest acquaintance with cultivated people, but how meaningless it is to our urbanised democracy only he can tell who has taken the pains to understand the working-class mind. The admirable article in *The Times* was addressed to the converted, like a sermon on the iniquities of drunkenness preached to a congregation composed of fanatical teetotallers, while most of the other newspapers in the country, particularly the Sunday papers which provide democracy with a vast budget of crime, took very good care to confirm their readers in the error which *The Times* rightly regards as socially dangerous.

"For a time," said one of these papers, "it seems as if Romance [*sic*] seeks the squalor of the slums rather than the salons of Society. Such a belief, of course, is all

wrong, as is learned when Society comes into the spotlight of the courts. Elemental passions blaze forth unashamed for all the world to wonder at. We discover anew that there is not one tittle of difference in its basis between love [*sic*] in the cottage and love in the castle."

The truth is that an urbanised democracy, cut off from all intimacy with the old territorial families, has no definition in its mind for a gentleman or a lady. It divides the nation into two classes, the Rich and the Poor, and all who are not poor go into the one category just as all who are not rich go into the other. Let a boor of the most contemptible kind stumble on a fortune in trade, and at once he becomes in the eyes of democracy a gentleman, and let a member of the leisured classes fall to the level of having to work with hands for a weekly wage, and at once he ceases to count as "a real gentleman." The fine distinctions of the old gamekeeper, the old butler, the old farmer, and even the old peasant, who smiled at the pretensions of jumped-up people, and could tell to a shade the difference between the various degrees of the middle classes, have now altogether departed. We are irretrievably committed to the most



ancient and scriptural division of a community, and are now a nation composed only of Rich and Poor

The term "class war," we should be careful to see, has nothing to do with social distinctions or any niceties of a caste system it is a purely economic term, and means the Poor *versus* the Rich, the Have-Nots *contra* the Haves

It is as well for us to understand that this is the settled view of society taken by the working classes, and that no amount of beauty, virtue, and sweetness in the highest quarters of the national life can save their possessors from the obloquy which falls upon the trumpeted banality of the vulgar Rich The indictment of the workers sweeps away all our careful distinctions, and with those distinctions, of course, a great many truths of high importance Rightly or wrongly, fairly or unfairly, it is an indictment which charges all those who have education and leisure with social uselessness and criminal selfishness

Nor is it of any avail to quote W S Gilbert, and retort upon the enraged critic that his own class is as guilty of ugly vice

as this other class of the Rich He will admit the charge, but will stoutly maintain that the Rich "ought to know better." And if a flippant person should assure him that these Rich people make no pretensions to setting the nation an example of any kind, either intellectual or moral, he will certainly reply that they ought to do so, and that if they do not discharge this obvious duty of a privileged class, they are far worse than bricklayers who will not build houses for the workers, and railwaymen who think nothing of the trade of the nation when they make a demand for higher wages

Whether we like it or not, whether we think it rational or absurd, the working classes of the country expect from those who have great possessions a lead in the art of living, and while the most crude among them blindly copy, or attempt to copy, the example set by the Rich, the more intelligent of their number regard the example now being set by our contemporary Rich as utterly disastrous to the national welfare.

Now I will ask the reader, having made this rough and ready but most useful because simplifying division of the community into

the two classes of Rich and Poor, to make a like antithesis of human conduct, and to divide morality into the ancient antipodes of Brain and Belly—a simplification of ethics which not only saves us from excursions into the disputable region of theology, but which will help us more clearly to understand the realistic attitude of the worker to the whole question of morals.

Let us, then, think of ourselves as a nation composed of Rich and Poor, every one of whom is living either for his Brain or his Belly. It will be seen at once that while the Poor are obliged by the very circumstances of their poverty to take serious and constant thought of the Belly, so that their life is largely a life of materialism, the Rich, for whom all the material comforts of life are already provided by circumstance, have ample time in which to cultivate the life of the Brain. Therefore it is not unreasonable of the Poor to expect from the Rich, not merely an example, but a decision as to which is the more satisfying form of life, that of the Brain or the Belly.

Never mind, they seem to say, what the clergyman tells us about the best way of living, these Rich have the knowledge

which can decide whether what the clergyman says is true or false, and also the experience of having tried both ways of life, both Brain and Belly, therefore they know which is the more satisfying: and so, let us follow their example.

Now let us ask ourselves, What is the example set by the Rich, or rather, since they profess to set no example, what is the effect of the mass behaviour of the Rich on people who have a struggle to exist and small time for cultivating what used to be called the spiritual life is that effect in favour of Brain or Belly?

It should be instructive to hear what an experienced London magistrate has to say on this matter. Here is the considered judgment of Mr J. A. R. Cairns recently given to a Sunday newspaper.

“Social morals are undoubtedly suffering from a grave defection, due, in my opinion, to a lessening of the sanctity in which family life should be held. We have let go our hold on the family as the unit of society, and the relaxing of this fundamental moral safeguard has been in the highest degree prejudicial to the people at large.

“Experience as a London magistrate forces

me reluctantly to the conclusion that the infection has unmistakably moved downwards, that is, from the higher to the lower strata of society

“I am profoundly convinced that the morals of the poor are sound at bottom. In the all-too-frequent cases of marital unhappiness that I come across in my daily work I find them, as a class, more responsive to their domestic and social obligations than those whose superior station in life protects them from many of the hardships and petty miseries of inadequate means

“The atmosphere of divorce and broken pledges, of responsibilities shelved in the interest of purely selfish ends, of naked human baseness indulging itself with impunity, is at once the chief result and cause of the spiritual disintegration we see on all sides to-day

“A section of the community seems to have lost the sense of moral responsibility—what old-fashioned people called ‘the sense of God’ ”

For myself I am persuaded that the total effect of the Rich is overwhelmingly on the side of Belly. It is not only that they contemptuously ignore the whole field of religion, but they make no bones at all about treating culture of the mind as an

affectation. It is a generation which would not only refuse to entertain Plato and Plotinus, but which would be bored by Talleyrand and Horace Walpole. In the estimation of these people, cultivation of the mind stops with the end of schooldays, and every man who continues the life of a scholar after that period is dismissed as "a highbrow."

Mr Lloyd George, who more and more reminds us of Matthew Arnold's "young man from the country," has recently carried this contempt of intellect into the field of politics, oblivious altogether of the fact that, like Champagny, he is obliged "to begin his day's work by repaning the blunders of the day before" he would have us believe that intellectuals are not to be trusted. Indeed, there is no field in our national life where this contempt of intelligence is more obvious than the political field, for let a statesman die, who for fifty years has so blundered the nation's affairs that we are now contemplating an economic collapse of the first magnitude, and both Houses of Parliament will compose eulogies in his honour which would persuade us that the dead man was the peer of Chatham and the co-equal of Burke.

This absurdity of politicians could not exist in a nation whose Rich were loyally maintaining the ancient cultural standards of civilisation. It is only possible in a people whose intellectual life is a chaos and whose moral life is guided by the reticences of decency rather than by "the inflexible integrity of the moral code." If the Rich were governed in all their ways by this inflexible integrity of the moral code, they would know that cultivation of the mind is one of the most elementary duties of the civilised man, and they would set such a tone in the social life as would render it well-nigh impossible for a blundering opportunist to pass himself off as a statesman, or for the House of Commons to make itself ridiculous on any occasion when the emotions are stirred.

It is because of their contempt for intelligence, which is the most manifest and dangerous of their disloyalties, that the Rich are leading the whole nation into the anarchy of materialism. I have set it down as the first of their disloyalties because everything else that is evil in their ways flows from this primal cause. Want of intelligence is the greatest crime against

civilisation which any of us can commit; it means that we do not take life seriously, that we abdicate those functions of the human soul which have lifted man above brute level, and that we refuse to entertain the notion of moral responsibility. It means, in brief, that we are living for the Belly, not for the Brain, and that our influence is on the side of a reversion to barbarism, not directed towards the ascent to a higher and therefore safer order of civilisation.

I do not think it is an extravagant thing to say that the German workman and the Scottish peasant know far more of their national literatures and feel a keener pride in their great poets than the rich English in the case of England's overwhelmingly more brilliant literature. Indeed, I believe the mass of our contemporary rich English to be ignorant of the very names of men who have glorified the land of England by their genius and who will be lovingly, even passionately, read so long as men have eyes to see. Moreover, I am persuaded that they have no knowledge at all of philosophy, and are aware of science only so far as it supplies them with comforts and toys. From every cultural point of view



I believe them to be more profoundly degraded than the middle classes of whom Matthew Arnold made fun fifty years ago

The Rich of our generation are not in general guilty of those crimes which in former days brought so many aristocracies to destruction. They are not gluttonous. They are not tyrannical. They are not arrogant. They are not given overmuch to an ostentatious exhibition of their wealth. On the other hand, they are disposed to a generosity which I suppose has never been excelled and entertain sentiments towards the Poor which, however distant and un-intimate, are at least kindly and well-intentioned.

Those dreadful cases in the law-courts which now so continually supply the newspapers with their most marketable news give a wholly false impression of the general life of the modern Rich. They are useful to the student of manners only as a symptom of the root disease which is destroying the social order. For every married woman who commits adultery there are a thousand who are faithful wives, and for every rich man who swindles and cheats in order to increase his wealth there are ten thousand

who are, in business, as just as Aristides and as incorruptible as Robespierre I do not believe for a moment that the Rich of our generation are great monsters, my view of them is that they are great fools As it was in old time, so to-day, but with far greater force, the accusation which life brings against the rich man is, "Thou fool."

Only a little thought is necessary to convince us that a person who keeps all the commandments of the decalogue can yet be far astray from the true life of a rational being A man may never cheat at cards or golf, and yet so assiduously play both cards and golf that he loses the capacity for enjoying higher and more lasting pleasures

This is the fault of our age We are not more wicked than our ancestors, but we are far greater blunderers They were saved from the worst retribution of their sins by a marked absence of triviality in their thinking Nelson may be taken usefully as a figure of the past Englishman, he had many faults, and was guilty of some things which were disgraceful; but he was tremendously in earnest, and with him duty

was a passion. The idea of moral responsibility up to quite a late time was diffused over the whole nation, and even poor starvelings in the Lancashire cotton factories, and miserable, unlettered colliers in Gloucestershire coalpits, trembled for their souls' salvation. It was not a prevalent belief in our nation at any time, I think, that a man may live as he chooses, that the laws of the universe do not apply to the human species, and that life has no more purpose than a dinner-party or a dance.

Moreover, we must remember that our ancestors lived in days when faith in death-bed repentances was more possible than it is in our own time. They had the excuse for their sins that confession of them lifted the penalty. The teaching of the Church was not yet challenged at its very centre by the findings of Science. Although the <sup>line</sup> of religion in England was set against the <sup>fact</sup> Roman doctrines of indulgences and the <sup>confessional</sup>, and although it was generally <sup>caught</sup> throughout the nation that the consequences of sin are eternal and that each man <sup>is</sup> directly responsible to God for the conduct of his life, still, the faith of the people was largely sentimental, largely

inclined to rest in the Church's easy way to a Paradise of bliss, and a sinner could always comfort himself with the assurance that "it is the *métier* of God to forgive."

In our own time there is no excuse for such disordered thinking. Science in all its branches confirms the sterner teaching that a man can reap only what he sows and that as a tree falls so it shall lie. It is, I should say, impossible for any man of even moderate intelligence to delude himself with the idea that a prayer at reaping time can convert a field sown with tares into a harvest of wheat, or that a life which has atrophied every faculty of the soul can suddenly take wing into the regions of intelligence, merely by a confession, however sincere, of its previous folly.

But while our ancestors, with their sentimentalised religion, were serious at least in all the greater matters of life, we, with no excuse for sentimentalism of any kind, are living with a trivialty of which they were never guilty. We are living, that is to say, as if history had no warnings, social existence no laws, and thought no influence

on conduct, and conduct no influence on destiny

And here we reach that crime of the Rich which is their severest condemnation For want of intelligence, they are setting an example to the whole nation of an ethical carelessness and a moral irresponsibility which are fatal to the social order and an offence against the teachings of both history and science In old days the Church, whatever her faults and failings, sought to fill men with "the consciousness of the supreme worth and greatness of human life," and to give to each one of them "a new sense of individual independence and responsibility" But in our time the influence of the Rich, which has superseded all other influences, is to demean human life, to diminish the demands of conscience, and to remove all strain of aspiration from the soul Just as mechanical science labours to make physical life easy and luxurious, with the consequence that men must suffer the degradation of Sadowism and the perils of patent medicines in order to escape the most hideous forms of disease, so the influence of Public Opinion is on the side of moral slackness and spiritual inertia, with consequences for the individual

soul, and for the body politic, which may fairly be likened to canes—a refusal of the cells to grow in their natural order.

Edward Caird taught us to see that “the tone of society is the result, not so much of the deliberate attempt of the members of it to influence each other, as of the unconscious action and reaction of their characters. Nor can anyone easily measure how great his own contribution has been to the good or evil spirit that prevails around him, or how, by casual deeds or actions, or even looks, he may have influenced the lives of others. We do not,” he insisted, “carry on our warfare at our own charges, but the whole weight of the evil that is in our society is dragging us down, and the whole force of the good that is in it is helping us up”

Dostoevsky had the same vision :

“Every day and every hour, every minute, walk round yourself and watch yourself, and see that your image is a seemly one. You pass by a little child, you pass by, spiteful, with ugly words, with wrathful heart, you may not have noticed the child, but he has seen you, and your image,

unseemly and ignoble, may remain in his defenceless heart. You don't know it, but you may have sown an evil seed in him and it may grow, and all because you were not careful before the child, because you did not foster in yourself a careful, actively beneficent love.

"Brothers, love is a teacher, but one must know how to acquire it, for it is hard to acquire, it is dearly bought, it is won slowly by long labour. For we must love not only occasionally, for a moment, but for ever."<sup>1</sup>

If the reader is inclined to regard this view of life as sentimental and impractical, let him pause to consider whether it is not justified by the teachings of psychology, and illustrated by the great catastrophic events of history. Dostoevsky himself, I would remind the sceptic, prophesied from the sights about him the reign of Bolshevism. He makes one of his characters in *The Possessed* speak as follows:

"Listen. I've reckoned them all up—a teacher who laughs with children at their God and at their cradle is on our side. The lawyer who defends an educated murderer because he is more cultured than his victims and could not help murdering to get money

<sup>1</sup> *The Brothers Karamazov*

is one of us The schoolboys who murder a peasant for the sake of sensation are ours. The juries who acquit every criminal are ours The prosecutor who trembles at a trial for fear he should not seem advanced enough is ours, ours Among officials and literary men we have lots, lots, and they don't know it themselves . . . Do you know how many we shall catch by little, ready-made ideas? When I left Russia, Littré's dictum that crime is insanity was all the rage, I come back and I find that crime is no longer insanity, but simply common sense, almost a duty, anyway a gallant protest . . . The Russian God has already been vanquished by cheap vodka The peasants are drunk, the mothers are drunk, the children are drunk, the churches are empty, and in the peasant courts one hears, "Two hundred lashes or stand us a bucket of vodka" Oh, this generation has only to grow up . . . Ah, what a pity there's no proletariat But there will be, there will be, we are going that way. . . ."

He makes this same character say . "We will proclaim destruction" "We'll set fires burning" "There will be an upheaval" "There's going to be such an upset as the world has never seen before. . . . Russia will be overwhelmed with darkness, the earth will weep for its old gods."



These words were written in 1870 Think of them, in the light of Leninism, before you dismiss such penetrating and deep thought as an absurdity, and then reflect upon these further words of Edward Caird

“Now, it is just because of the littleness in which the greatness of human life is hidden”—every thought, every action, even every look—“because of the apparent insignificance of the detail of our existence from day to day, that we do not realise the moral importance of our actions Life, we might say, is a tragedy disguised as a comedy it is a comedy when our eye is merely on the moment with its passing interest and humours, it is a tragedy when we consider it as a whole, and discern the great moral issues ripening for decision in the process of the years”

Every revolution in history has been the consequence of a contempt for “the inflexible integrity of the moral code” on the part of those who set the tone of public opinion.

So stupid are the Rich that they do not even perceive the superior value of virtue They cannot see that its happiness is a desirable thing, or that its security is essential

to their own safety. A married woman who thinks it no sin to break the seventh commandment would be outraged if her maid proceeded to break the eighth in the case of her jewels, or if her butler attempted to break the sixth in her own person. A man who considers that life has no moral purpose, and that his own business with it is to get all the pleasure out of it he possibly can, would be something more than annoyed if his solicitor absconded with his money or his governess inculcated in the minds of his children the principles of the brothel and the bucket-shop

These people, the adulterous married woman and the self-indulgent immoralist, are not more absurd, however, than those law-abiding rich people who express the most religious indignation against political agitators and seditious atheists, while they themselves make no fight whatsoever against the low moral and cultural standards prevailing in their own body

Those who have most reason for desiring morality in the people who serve them should, as a mere measure of precaution, be most careful to cultivate in themselves "the delicacy, integrity, and authority of Conscience." And those who have wit

## DECLENSION

enough to see that without a moral basis the whole structure of civilisation must collapse should so strengthen their minds by moral discipline that they will be able to resist the disruptive efforts of the moral and political anarchist.

## II

LABOUR is tending towards economic suicide chiefly if not solely because there is no example in the nation of intelligence, duty, and a moral aim. It looks up from its dull toil, in the cramped and sordid circumstances of its domestic life, and sees the Rich behaving, not as great sinners, but as if existence had no other purpose than the gratification of animal appetites. It concludes, therefore, that there are no moral conditions to the economic life of a nation, and that the only rational consideration for a grown man is to have, in the language of the Rich, "a good time."

Dr. Shadwell thinks that Socialism is gaining ground more by the excesses of the Rich than by the arguments of its propagandists. In the columns of *The Times* recently he published an article on the growth of Socialism in which the following passage occurred :

"If the Labour Party could get more

electoral support after being in office than before, and that in spite of the coquetting with Bolshevism which undoubtedly stimulated the reaction on the other side, it seems to me clear that they are in the running for a further advance. And, according to my observations, they are making it, being greatly assisted by the illustrated daily and weekly papers which depict the ostentatious amusements and describe the vicious indulgence of the 'idle rich'. This flaunting of luxury by the popular Press in the face of those who enjoy less comfort than they did or are positively distressed is a far greater asset to the agitator than his own papers. Argument avails nothing against the feeling of injustice so aroused and against the promise of relief offered by Socialism, which is much too attractive not to win increasing support until it has been put to a more convincing test."

This "flaunting of luxury," it should be observed, acts upon the Poor in two ways. It is true that it inspires the agitator with the most deadly of his arguments in favour of class hatred, but I am sure it acts far more destructively and directly on the lives of those among the Poor who never listen to an agitator, nor bother their heads about politics—and who are mainly, perhaps, of

a Conservative inclination—by corrupting their minds with ideas which are inimical to an intelligent and a moral life.

From very remarkable letters which reach me nearly every day, written by working-class people all over the country, and particularly people in the industrial regions, I am persuaded that it is not so much envy or hatred of the Rich which is corrupting the mind of the English Poor as a doubt concerning the validity of spiritual life

It is true that many letters reach me which complain angrily of the apparent indifference of the Rich to the hard sufferings and the crippling sorrows of the Poor at a time of great industrial distress. When we were wanted (these letters run) to save the Rich from a German invasion they came among us, treated us as their friends, and worked hard to ease our burdens and to earn our confidence, but now that their necks are safe they leave us in worse difficulties than any we have known hitherto, and spend their whole time in pleasure-seeking and self-indulgence, careless of how we are housed, or how we are starved, and how our children are falling into evil habits on account of their enforced idleness.

But these letters are not so numerous as those which attempt to argue with me on moral questions, and which are inspired in many instances by a most harsh contempt for religion and a very bitter scepticism concerning the whole range of ethics. It seems to me that many of these writers hug to themselves the idea of their animal origin, and are delighted to find in their gorilla relationship an excuse for every thought and act which degrade the human species. It is not only God, the Supreme Excellence, at which these unhappy people aim the shafts of their crude satire, but at every teacher who insists that the moral law is as solid a fact as natural law.

“If what you say is true, how can you account for the life lived by the Rich—dancing, card-playing, fox-hunting, racing, motoring, and dressing-up like fools in a pantomime? These people have had a good education. The parsons can’t fool them. Conan Doyle and his spooks can fool only a few of them—the superstitious ones, a mere handful. The bulk of them know what’s what, and their idea of life is to have a good time and to hell with everything else. Why not? Who has ever seen a soul, or heard a voice from heaven?”

Such is the burden of innumerable letters with which I attempt to deal in the Press, and in dealing with them I am always conscious that the example set by the Rich is the stiffest obstacle in my way to the conscience of the writers. The atmosphere in which we dispute is poisoned by a behaviour which lessens all sense of moral responsibility, and reduces the voice of conscience to something even less than a twilight whisper from the altars of paganism.

There is nothing in the economic conduct of the Poor which cannot be justified by the moral conduct of the Rich. If the Poor behave as though food will come to them from overseas whether they practise economy or not, do not the Rich behave as if their immense privileges were unrelated to any moral law or any social consideration? And if the Poor, as so many people complain of them, have lost all pleasure in their work, and regard labour of any kind as a toil, and are minded to think of life solely as an opportunity for gratifying their lower nature, is it not true that the Rich, in the mass, are guided in their handling of existence by principles of an exactly similar content, and are as dead to any sense of duty as the



worst work-shy in the country or the most unconscionable sponge now living on the dole ?

Let a man who has eyes to see look round about him on the national life, and tell us where he can find an example set by the Rich which is even patriotic, much less moral or spiritual, and where he can discover in the whole crowded round of the Social Season any sense of a great and urgent duty owing to the Poor and to the future of the British people, or any feeling at all that life is a discipline of the human spirit

Is it not true that the mass-effect of the life lived by the Rich is wholly an effect of materialism, and that from them no other notion of human existence is received by the Poor than one of animal pleasures ? Is there in the dark cities of our stricken industrialism any sense of the presence of a befriending and humanising aristocracy, or even in the Houses of Parliament a leading towards duty and a higher life for the whole community on the part of those who ought to be the captains of our fate and even the inspired prophets of our destiny ?

It is an alarming thought for any man who

can think at all that the new leaders of the Poor should be politicians pursuing a purely economic end, and that from the Rich they should receive no leadership of any kind, but only a most disastrous example. Many of the politicians who are teaching Socialism to the Poor are men of high character and singular attractiveness, many of them as desirous for Socialism on grounds of æstheticism, culture, and religion as on grounds that are economic. But the agitator who lives with the Poor, and who organises the forces of Socialism in his own neighbourhood, not from an office in London or from a seat in the House of Commons, is seldom, so far as my experience goes, an idealist of any kind, but rather an atheist who would brutalise the soul of man, and who is inspired by a hatred of good, a contempt of beauty, and a loathing of all truth outside the boundaries of natural history.

Such men as these, all over the country, are organising the forces of Socialism in a spirit of the bitterest class hatred and the most uncompromising form of atheism. Against them the Rich make no fight on moral grounds, but content themselves with subsidising Conservative street-orators to

dispute their economic arguments and to distribute dull pamphlets denouncing Bolshevism. The only real opposition encountered by these demagogic atheists of political economy is to be found in the conscience which still exists in so many of our Poor, a conscience descended to them from an age when men and women were "mending their lives," and when God was as great a reality in the existence of the nation even as Mammon.

This stubborn conscience of the Poor, which still believes in Right and Wrong, and which still believes in duty, parental responsibility, and the justice of the moral law, is the one bulwark left standing in our country between order and anarchy, between evolution and revolution. It is, I think, the most English thing left to us, a thing which the cosmopolitan Rich in London may be quite incapable of understanding, but nevertheless it is a spirit and a mind in our national life which has the simplicity of all great truths and also contains the elements of all true greatness.

There is, whatever this age may care to think, an enormous gulf between Right and Wrong, and on the inflexible integrity of

the moral code hangs the whole future of the human race.

“ ’Tis not the same with *Goodness* as with other Qualitys, which we may understand very well, and yet not possess We may have an excellent Ear in *Musick*, without being able to perform in any kind We may judg well of *Poetry*, without being Poets, or possessing the least of a Poetick Vein : But we can have no tolerable Notion of *Goodness*, without being tolerably good So that if the *Praise* of a Divine Being be so great a part of his Worship, we shou’d, methinks, learn Goodness, were it for nothing else than that we might learn, in some tolerable manner, how to *praise*. For the praise of Goodness from an unsound hollow Heart, must certainly make the greatest dissonance in the world ”

This same philosopher of the early eighteenth century, Lord Shaftesbury, who was the most brilliant enemy of superstition, as he was the most delicate and delightful ironist of all Pedagogy, in another of his essays meets the charge of those who, like our dreary Rich, declare, “ That all Actions are *naturally indifferent*, that they have no Note or Character of Good, or Ill,

*in themselves*, but are distinguished by mere FASHION, LAW, or *arbitrary Deeree* ”

“ Shou’d a Writer upon Musiek, addressing himself to the Students and Lovers of the Art, declare to ’em, ‘ That the Measure or Rule of Harmony was Caprice or Will, Humour or Fashion ’, ’tis not very likely he shou’d be heard with great Attention, or treated with real Gravity For Harmony is Harmony by *Nature*, let Men judg ever so ridiculously of Musiek

“ ’Tis the same case where *Life* and MANNERS are concern’d *Virtue* has the same fix’d Standard The same *Numbers*, *Harmony*, and *Proportion* will have place in MORALS, and are discoverable in the *Characters* and *Affections* of Mankind; in which are laid the just Foundations of an Art and Science, superior to every other of human Practice and Comprehension

“ . Things are stubborn, and will not be as we fancy ’em, or as the Fashion varies, but as they stand in Nature ”

The mother in the slums who teaches her children to be truthful, and encourages them to be industrious, and strengthens them to fight against those crude temptations of the flesh which war against peace of mind

and purity of soul, is doing a work for her country which only the greatest historians can appreciate at its true value.

For it is on this fight of every individual with his lower nature that the advance of humanity depends, and it is only by a recognition of moral law and the place of conscience in evolution that such a fight can be waged with the full force of the reason behind it.

If the Rich gave to the Poor a feeling that this sublime contention of the soul was the main occupation of their existence, and that all their efforts were bent upon the elevation of human life and the untrammelled pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty, and that they set their faces most sternly against anything in art, literature, the drama, manners, or morals, which tended in any way to the degradation of man's soul and the corruption of his heart, they would find in the simple conscience of the Poor such an ally of evolution and patriotism that class hatred could not exist. Then we should no longer be a house divided against itself.

But it must be said of the Rich what was well said of a French statesman by a great historian, that *a low moral vitality had as*

*much to do with the stains on his life as violent passions or extreme temptations*

The Rich, if they would be saved, and if they would play their due part in the salvation of England, must learn to judge of things, of all things, as they promote, or fail to promote, the delicacy, integrity, and authority of Conscience

### III

A CHILD, when it receives a parcel through the post, is impatient of the string which fastens it and of the paper which wraps it. It would tear them violently aside in order to satisfy the greed of its curiosity.

It does not reflect that but for those troublesome obstacles to its satisfaction the fine and delicate present inside the parcel, which has had to travel many miles and in buffeting company with other packages, would have been so damaged as to have lost its value.

One may say that something of this thoughtlessness, pardonable enough in an excited child, is visible in the behaviour of the Rich to the great gift of life.

They seem to have no understanding of how far that gift has travelled to them nor of how many dangers it has encountered on its long journey. The laws which condition it have no significance in their eyes; and they are as impatient of everything



which protects it from the rough usage of their immediate enjoyment as a child with a toy

It is their own excitement in the gift that moves them, not the gift itself, and in their haste to gratify their passion for egoistic satisfaction, they so break the fastenings and so tear the wrappings of Nature's protecting grace that their parcel of life is damaged before its use is ascertained or its character understood

Nothing is more striking in the lives of the Rich than their dreariness. This dreariness is to be observed even in their children. Many of the occupants of their nurseries appear to be *blasé* before they can frame an intelligent sentence. Two headmasters of well-known preparatory schools have told me that many boys of the present generation do not know how to play, and even have to be taught how to throw a cricket ball and how to run. Certainly if one compares the boys returning to their homes from the great public schools with a party of boys from East London going into the country for a single day's outing, the vitality of the first would seem a singularly poor thing beside the vitality of the second.

If, then, the life of the Rich is damaged at its outset, and their childhood is without the natural elation and high spirits which are so delightful in the children of the struggling Poor, we must expect to find dreariness of a pathetic character and an increasing melancholy in their older years.

This dreariness is altogether masked from the Poor, who read only of the festivals of Fashion and see pictures only of the carnivals of Mammon, and never come upon the Rich in their privacy. To the Poor, the Rich seem to be always *en fête*, and to be as satisfied with the great and ceaseless junketing of the fashionable year as a slum girl on a roundabout on Hampstead Heath, or a slum youth in a crowded railway-carriage bound for Hurst Park or Epsom Downs. It is quite impossible for them to believe that the Rich are not happy, and probably if they were convinced that the Rich are of all people in the community the most dreary and dissatisfied, the more thoughtless of them would at once condemn those Rich on grounds of ingratitude. But the Poor never will believe that the Rich are unhappy. They conceive of them as the most enviable of all created beings, and regard the look of

boredom worn on their sad faces much as an affectation—like a glass in the eye or a snuffling Pekingese under the arm

But the sins which bring so many fashionable people into the law-courts are not evidence of "violent passions or extreme temptations"; far rather are they evidences of "a low moral vitality." These unnatural people are so bored with their artificial existence, so "fed up," as they say, with the grind of fashionable life, that they take up the worry and fear of an intrigue, or the anxiety and desperation of gambling, even as a tired brain-worker may turn to the teasing demands of a cross-word puzzle merely in order to vary the strain upon his mind

There is no peace in their ways, because they are not growing at the centre of their being. They are unhappy because their whole existence is a defiance of the moral law. They can no more be happy than a miser can be rich or a valetudinarian be well. And the more they try to be happy the more conscious must they become of dejection. There is truly not a whit more wisdom or even sanity in their conduct than one would find in an astronomer who sought to

discover the movements of the stars by watching the winking electric-lights of advertisements in Piccadilly Circus.

At the last exhibition in Burlington House of pictures by competitors for the *Prix de Rome* there was scarcely one single work on the walls which suggested even a blind fumbling towards, much less a passion for, beauty. The effort of every canvas was to break the ancient rules of art and to appear *bizarre*, startling, grotesque, and even affronting.

The notion that beauty is one of the intelligible aims of the human spirit has never evidently occurred to these young artists of the present day. They would be able to make nothing, I suppose, of the breathing loveliness in the greatest painters before Raffaele, or to understand the haunting grace of the spiritual idea in one of Mr Chesterton's latest poems

Our Lady went into a strange country,  
And they crowned her for a queen ,  
For she needed never to be stayed or questioned,  
But only seen ,  
And they were broken down by unbearable beauty,  
As we have been

I remarked to a friend of mine, that it was

odd one could not laugh at such grotesque pictures, for although they were absurd, yet in some mysterious fashion they escape comicality. She replied to me, "But don't you see why? It is because they are evil."

Mr George Belcher, who is surely not only a considerable artist, but a courageous satirist of our civilisation, never attempted anything more grotesque than two of these pictures at Burlington House, one representing a fat and repulsive orange-coloured nude woman, and another, two hooded and cloaked figures, bowed together in what appeared to be the agony of an intestinal throe, with nothing showing of their bodies save hideous and aggressively huge feet at the bottom of the canvas, yet one could not laugh at these pictures, could not, indeed, repress a shudder, and perhaps the reason lay in the yet unarticulated knowledge that they were essentially evil.

Such pictures—the work, be it remembered, of young art students, who should be reading Shakespeare and Keats, and studying with ardent passion the works of Constable and Gainsborough—furnish us with a clue to the cause of our national disorder. They are

infected with the aimlessness of the age. They are like the modern newspaper which cannot bear to print anything of length in its entirety, but must dodge the reader from page to page and from column to column, until in turning the sheet he loses both the thread of the argument and his interest in the essay, and gives himself up to glancing at the paragraphs or the headlines which interrupt his reading. They witness to a love of disorder, they are the utterances not of a mind but the samples of a rag-bag.

As to the contemporary fashion in pictures, the following paragraph published in the *Daily Graphic*, under the title of "The King of Shockers," gives us a general notion

"London is fairly wallowing in Norman Lindsay's nudes. There were so many people there yesterday that you could scarcely get in, and by the rows of little red tabs it would seem that few of the pictures will go back to Australia.

"Lord ——<sup>1</sup> found a few minutes to run in and look at them, and so did Mr ——, Lord ——, and the Duke of ——, but most

<sup>1</sup> The name was that of a prominent statesman who has held the highest offices in the State

of the purchasers have asked that their names should be kept secret

“One man confessed that he had had two Lindsay drawings for years, but that he always kept them hidden behind the piano away from the eyes of his wife, while an M P said he would have to keep his in his locker in the House of Commons ”

If this is not an appreciative chuckle over the disgusting proclivities of a prurient mind, the journalist has written his paragraph so badly that he has traduced Mr Norman Lindsay's work and needlessly outraged the feelings of the decent reader In whatever way one cares to read this unpleasant piece of modern journalism, it witnesses unquestionably to a challenge of æsthetic rules and moral standards which were lately taken for granted among educated people, save only the perverse and the diseased

“To the clean all things are clean—thus say the people I, however, say unto you To the swine all things become swinish ”

The same spirit may be noticed in the popular music of the day, which must be extraordinary rather than melodious, and which must come as near to breaking the laws of harmony as the composer can

manage without reaching absolute discord or an extreme of banality. The exquisite tenderness of our traditional English music, born in those glowing days when every country gentleman was a master of glee-singing and Sir Francis Drake never put to sea without the companionship of viols, has become in these days almost the affectation of a few gentle spirits. The great mass of the nation, led by the dreary Rich, demand a music of spasms and jerks, to which alone they and their disordered minds can listen or dance with any semblance of pleasure. That much of this dance music is frankly and even very disgustingly sensual is apparent enough. But its defiance of the laws which govern all true music is the main symptom it affords of the disease with which the present generation is so disastrously stricken. It is the music of a disordered mind.

As to the novel which is popular among the Rich, and for which they neglect the great work of our noblest minds, one need only say that it has an enervating effect, and produces in the reader nothing but a feeling of weariness and a tendency to cynicism. The last novel I have read, written by a



woman, the technical excellence of which is considerable, tells the story of young children going off to commit adultery with great scoundrels, and besides making use of such exclamations as "Christ!" and such adjectives as "bloody," speaks of "the lavatory," and relates an incident in which a girl takes off a button from her drawers in church to put in an offertory bag. If this is an extreme case, it may safely be said that no novel for many years has been written, and has commanded the attention of educated people, which stiffens the sinews and summons up the blood of the British people. It is as if we are too bored or too tired to raise our heads, and have only energy and interest enough to poke them over our neighbour's backyard for a look and a smell of his dustbin. Noteworthy is it that most of these diseased books are written with that brevity of sentences and that frequent interjection of asterisks which express the working of a disordered and spasmodic mind. One can almost feel the jerk of the writer's head as he passes from one find to another in the disgusting dustbin.

This same jerkiness of the mind, which is of course an indication of grave spiritual

unrest, has altogether destroyed the valuable educational discipline of intelligent conversation. Table-talk has degenerated into gossip or staccato flippancies. People meet and separate with no new ideas in their mind, no enlargement of their understanding, but only with their stupidity confirmed and their boredom deepened. Even the youngest of girls, fresh from the nursery, needs the aid of cocktails to support such tediousness and must smoke either between the courses (which shows that the art of eating is dead) or immediately the meal is over, in order to keep her place at the table and her irritability in check.

We have forgotten that until the dull pedagogues of the eighteenth century began writing immense volumes on a single subject, and no serious critic would take notice of a book that was not a folio and interrupted at every turn by quotations from Greek and Latin authors, that the culture of mankind proceeded in a very great measure from the clash of wits in conversation of a noble order.

The most eminent and almost divine genius of the ancient world conveyed his illuminating ideas to mankind, ideas on the deepest mysteries of the human soul, in the

form of cheerful dialogues , and “ the scene was commonly laid at table, or in the public walks or meeting-places ” We, in our time, have rightly laughed the dull pedagogue from our tables ; but as Shaftesbury warns us, “ we carry the laugh but half-way ”

“ The false Earnest is ridiculed, but the false Jest passes secure, and becomes as errant Deceit as the other ”

That is where we are so dangerously astray from the truth of existence We cannot see that if wit and raillery are to keep us in the way of peace they must be turned against the deceitful jest and the degrading flippancy as well as against a false gravity and a hollow pomposity. Buffoonery is not for civilised beings, and was unknown among the ancients All true Wit is in the service of truth and beauty and goodness

There is one aspect of the cinema which may fitly find a place in this volume I am told on good authority that no influence is so steadily sapping British influence in India as the film, mostly manufactured in America, among what surroundings we all know, which traffics in the sordid immoralities

of the English Rich It is quite certain that these films are also doing incalculable harm among the working classes, illustrating, as they seem to do, the budget of immorality provided for their reading in the Sunday newspaper. There is a censor in Ireland who will not permit these films to be exhibited to the public, and who has therefore incurred the fierce anger of those commercial interests in the United States which frankly deal with life in a pornographic spirit, but our censorship takes a more lenient view of these things, and neither the Church nor the Rich nor the Press, so far as I am aware, makes any continued protest against this wholesale corruption of the public mind. I need not say, of course, that from an intellectual point of view the American film is beneath contempt, and therefore an influence on the side of stupidity.

If we went to the theatre for signs of unsoundness it would be an easy task, but how disgustful, to fill a volume with tragic examples of intellectual degradation and moral chaos But I prefer to cite the modern theatre as an example of mob rule Ever since the war certain men of education and taste, notably Mr. St. John Ervine and

Mr. James Agate, have laboured to deliver the stage from the influence of Leicester Square and Montmartre. With great force and keen brillianee these conscientious men have sought to shame the stage out of the gutter and to strengthen it for the ascent to a place of real intellectual influence. But how contemptuous of educated judgment are the directors of the theatre may be seen from the following criticism in the *Daily Mail* of a play which, as I write, has been produced in London.

“A duologue between Miss Edna Best and Miss Tallulah Bankhead provides the greater part of *Fallen Angels*, Mr Noel Coward's new play, produced at the Globe Theatre, London, on Tuesday night.

“The two actresses appear as young married women—presumably ‘idle rich’—who have been friends since their schooldays. Each—so mutual confessions have revealed—has been the mistress for one hectic week before marriage of the same man—a Frenchman called Maurice. And on the day when their husbands had gone out of town to play golf the wives receive letters from Maurice to say that he is on his way to London.

“They wait together for his arrival, each rather glorying in the idea that she will be

unable to resist her former lover when appears. They smirk and smile and glow in memories of the naughty week seven years before. And as they wait to drink too much champagne, they become slowly drunk. Foolish laughter is followed by alcoholic tears, they quarrel, and the act ends when one staggers from her friend flat, knocking over a chair in her progress while the other sheds maudlin tears.

"That long-drawn-out drunken scene won the loudest applause of the play. And certainly the two actresses gave remarkable fine performances. There was nothing exaggerated, everything was unpleasantly real.

"Miss Bankhead's leer of triumph when she pronounced the word 'psychology' with a slurring the syllables was a little artistic triumph. And what a change for Miss Best after those nice, slangy flappers that she has played so often!

"The majority of the audience seemed to find the scene vastly amusing. It was received with loud laughter—but it was not a healthy sort of laughter. Indeed, there was scarcely a healthy laugh in the play.

"It was as if Mr. Coward had set himself with mischievous cynicism to shock the people who like to be shocked.

"It is a play of smart lines, of its kind a clever play. But it will not enhance the

reputation Mr Coward made with *The Vortex*, which has a serious purpose and a moral lesson *Fallen Angels* offers only the flippancies of vice "

Educated opinion is derided The appeal is made to the basest sections of the community Everything that is beautiful, creative, and strong is neglected by the directors of the English stage, and everything that is base, contemptible, and disruptive is exhibited for the unhealthy laughter of the mob and the satisfied laughter of England's enemies I think it is true to say that in no country of Europe is the theatre fallen to so low a degree of degradation as it is in the capital city of the British Empire

Further evidence of disorder and of moral carelessness may be seen in many of the commercial pictures which are posted about the streets of our cities or used as advertisements in the newspapers and magazines The prevailing look in these pictures is a prurient leer, and their only tone a guffaw of sensuality No one nowadays seems able to advertise a box of chocolates without calling the world's attention to a woman's

ankle, and cigarettes would apparently go unsmoked unless the picture of a girl showing her knees was for ever confronting the public. Plays of a comic character would attract us by some such picture as that of a woman immodestly fastening her garter, and there is scarcely a soap in the world or an article of attire or a throat lozenge which can be sold without some representation of a woman *en déshabillé*.

These matters are not trivial. That is to say, they are not merely wanting in delicacy and restraint, not merely exhibitions of a coarse taste and a crude mentality, but they witness unmistakably to the age's acceptance of Shaftesbury Avenue as an authority in public manners and to a complete contempt for the opinion of educated people.

Moreover, they witness to an extraordinary and most culpable carelessness in the matter of children. The streets of London are not only in the possession of pimps and panders, or of goggle-eyed and pot-bellied sensualists from the provinces and foreign countries, whose degradation cannot be brought lower by the sharp-witted salaciousness of advertising agents, they are also crowded by children, whose



eyes are greedy for pictures, and whose minds are alert for every possible impression of the grown-up world. Where the adult merely glances at the picture of a woman adjusting her garter, the child stares, and where the adult forgets the thing almost as quickly as he has seen it, the child thinks about it long afterwards, and wonders why such reticences are exposed to the public view.

Thus is given to the defenceless mind of children (let the reader remember my quotation from Dostoevsky on p. 61, better still, let him read those solemn words once again) a ply which is as unwholesome for body's health as it is dangerous for mental cleanliness and spiritual strength.

How easily these things explain one of the greatest crimes of the present day, the delight taken by the adult factory worker in corrupting and defiling the minds of young apprentices, and perhaps also the terrible increase in the sin of incest among the working classes. The whole public atmosphere of our cities and of our times reeks of the brothel.

These evidences of disorder which I have mentioned merely in passing explain to

me why there is so much unrest in the world—so much dreariness in the world of the Rich, so much discontent in the world of the Poor.

There is no central Authority in our life. There is no discipline in our ways. We have abolished the right of Church, Aristocracy, and Learning to dictate to us, or even to advise us, what we should think and what we should do, and we have allowed the worst elements in the community to flood the world with ideas which can appeal only to the baser sort of mankind—that dim mob of underlings whose aggregated pennies enrich the profiteer and whose pitiable ignorance of true existence renders them the prey of every scoundrel in the community.

So far as I can judge, no protest against these things is made by any organised body in the country. The mob have it all their own way. The dignity of English life—its proud restraint, its sweet kindness, its calm earnestness, and its sure sense of the right path—all these precious things are fast being swept out of the main current of our national existence by the muddy and defiled waters of democracy in flood.

## IV

THE political vanity of the working man, who finds himself, by the sheer weight of numbers, the strongest power in the State, is a characteristic of the times which accounts in no small measure for our economic confusion and our industrial misfortunes. It is one of the most disturbing signs of our unsoundness.

"It is not your sin—it is your self-satisfaction that crieth unto heaven." The greatest thing a mediocre person can experience, let the worker and the political agitator reflect, is "the hour of self-contempt"—that hour of truth when he says "What good is my reason? Doth it long for knowledge as the lion for his food? It is poverty and pollution and wretched self-complacency."

Masses of the working men, for whom that great hour has not yet arrived, are now thoroughly convinced (but only because they have been so insistently told so) that they are the creators of all wealth, and that

those whom they deride and denounce as Capitalists are no better than so many parasites preying on the skill and industry of hand Labour.

It is a curious truth that this gigantic conceit should have established itself in the confused mind of the worker at a period in history when he is more incapable than ever before in the whole course of our industrial evolution of self-support, and when he is so conscious of his abject dependence on the creative wit and organising intelligence of other men that he himself complains to us of being no better than "a wage slave."

How helpless he has become, and how seriously he has lost the vigorous quality of self-reliance which made his father so strong a figure in the national life, and so bold a pioneer in the rough work of colonising the empire, the world may learn from a recent report of Dr Charles Myers, a distinguished man of science, and the Director of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology. It would appear from this report that men who are prepared to take over the governance of our complex empire

and to revolutionise the entire mechanism of credit, and to establish human life on foundations which have never yet succeeded in supporting a country parish or a market town, are wholly incapable of doing even their daily work in a manner which conduces to their own personal comfort and well-being

The psychologists of the Institute have taught packers how to pack goods with greater ease to themselves and yet with a measurable increase in quickness, "the workers," we read, "were unanimous in their approval of the change" The employed people in a catering firm were taught to reduce their breakages of china by over 53 per cent, in the case of one article by over 70 per cent, and by a method which "alleviated fatigue, irritation, and worry on the part of the workers", these workers, we read, bore testimony "to the greater smoothness and ease of their work after the changes had been introduced" Miners in a Lancashire pit were taught by the psychologists even how to swing their picks, and they declared that they could get more coal with less effort by the new method. "we are doing better, but cannot say why, except that we feel we are working more

smoothly ; we also feel more contented ”  
And so on, and so on

I should be sorry to write with any appearance of bitterness about the mind of the working man. The numbing effect of mechanical toil upon his intelligence, the dark and dismal circumstances of his domestic life, the coarse temptations with which society allows the publican, the newspaper proprietor, and the seller of films to beset him for the one degrading purpose of their own ignoble and unconscionable gain, and also his complete banishment from man's natural environment of the countryside—these things, and his hard and sordid struggle to pay the expenses of even such a miserable existence as is his at the present time, entitle him to the sympathy of every rational individual, and ought to move the whole power of the State to his assistance.

Nor when I venture to censure his political vanity am I urged by any other desire than to render him a service. For this vanity is as bad for him as it is for the Rich, and may well lead him from strike to strike, enriching his leaders but impover-

ishing himself and his children, until at last there is nothing left of British trade for him to strike against, except its ruins. So interwoven is a modern community that the penury of the workers inflicts loss on both manufacturer and tradesman, while the improvidence and even the greed of the Rich, however censorable from a moral point of view, cannot but act as some sort of benefit to the Poor.

But the workman, whose poor overplus of pence at the week's end tempts not only the proprietor of Sunday newspapers and the publican and the film merchant, but also the political agitator who dislikes manual labour as much as he enjoys the excitement of underground political plotting, is in so dangerous a plight at the present moment that every vestige of his native prudence should actuate him to take most careful stock of his economic position. Vanity will not serve him any more than rhetoric or passion. He must humble himself before economic law, as the man of science humbles himself before natural law, and he must have no other desire in his mind than the very practical desire to discover the truth of his position.

It may serve him in good stead when he returns from listening to a speech by some such intellectual being as Mr Kirkwood or Mr Maxton to think over a wise and prudent saying by Burke "Many things have been said, and very well undoubtedly, on the subjection in which we should preserve our bodies to the government of our understanding, but enough has not been said upon the restraint which our bodily necessities ought to lay on the extravagant sublimities and excentrick roving of our minds "

First of all, it should be clear to him that he is dependent on people overseas for 80 per cent of his food, and that he can make himself sure of getting those supplies only by co-operating with others in seeing that the growers of his food get what they want. It is as certain that he cannot get that food unless he sends its growers what they want, as it is certain that he cannot buy beer or tobacco without money. If he fail to supply the growers of food with their requirements, he must starve as certainly as he would have to forgo his Sunday newspaper without a penny to pay for it.

This is the central truth of his economic



condition. Beyond that lies a question which is nothing nearly so complex as the politician would have us believe. It is, *For whom shall he work?* He should know very well that whatever may happen in the future to Mr George Lansbury or Mr Harry Pollitt, to Mr Wheatley or Mr A. J. Cook, he himself will have to work for his living. He will still be a miner or a cotton operative, a riveter or a furnace-man, a printer or a bricklayer. No change in the headquarters of government will provide him with a seat in the House of Commons, an office in Bloomsbury, or a villa in Dulwich. He will still be living in Glasgow or Crewe, in Burnley or Middlesbrough, in Newcastle or Devonport, and for him, even if the Red Flag flies from the Clock Tower at Westminster instead of the Union Jack, the factory syren will still call in the early dawn, and the week-end still find him in the position of receiving a wage for his labour. Nor, let him reflect, will any generous impulse on the part of new rulers be able to increase his wages or to lessen his hours of labour, since the thing that he makes, if it is to earn him his food from overseas, must be sold in competition with the thing made by other nations, and nations as hungry as himself.

He may be certain of this, at least, that under the most Socialistic Government of which he can conceive, he will be just as hard at work as the manual labourers now are in Soviet Russia, and that his wages, as in Russia under the Bolshevists, will be screwed down to the lowest point in the economic interest of the whole State.

This being a fact of which he cannot entertain a doubt, he may be willing to go a step further and to ask two questions of great importance. First, *Is the Socialist politician inviting the worker to make a Socialistic State in the worker's interest, or in the Socialist politician's interest?* And second, *Is the Socialist politician likely to be more successful than the present directors of British trade and commerce in selling the products of the workman's labour in foreign markets?*

The answers are surely obvious. The workman is to put his shoulder to the political wheel in order to make an easy job for the propagandist of Socialism, he himself returning obediently to the workshop, the mine, and the engine-plate when the job is done.

And, in the second case, the Socialist, directing the affairs of the State, could no more guarantee him a market for his products overseas than Mr Ramsay MacDonald can compel the intelligent mechanics of America to vote for Communism, or Mr J H Thomas by the writing of a dispatch, or Mr Philip Snowden by writing in the *Weekly Dispatch*, could nationalise the Canadian Pacific Railway.

No political change, it is quite obvious, can abridge in any way the economic necessities of the British workman. He would still have to work, he would still have to sell in the open market of the world, and he would still have masters to direct his labour. Therefore he is asked to run the enormous risk of overturning a system which at least works, merely to set up a system which would have to be, so far as he is concerned, an exact replica of the present system if it is to work at all, and which may not work at all in the inexperienced hands of men who so far have given us evidence only of the extravagant sublimities and eccentric roivings of their minds. Is it worth the workman's while to entertain such a hazardous experiment?

But the agitator will reply to me that the present system does not work, and is condemned by him on that solid economic ground. The answer to this objection is simple enough. The present system worked very well, well enough to make us the greatest nation in Europe, until he came upon the scene, and it would work well enough now to assure us of a reasonable national prosperity if all his efforts were not directed to its destruction. It works marvellously well in the United States of America, and it is very certain that Bolshevism could not work even as badly as it works now if agitators in Russia were allowed to preach ca'-canny and to organise strikes.

Nothing is more absurd and irrational in the present condition of our politics than the effrontery of the Socialist in criticising the success of a system which he himself is engaged in attempting to wreck. It is as if a man attempted to prove the ineffectiveness of Christian ethics by persuading his friends to get drunk, to commit murder, and to hate their neighbours. Or it is as if a man would demonstrate the danger of water drinking by adding a virulent poison to the tumblers of his dupes and the reservoirs of the New River Company.

If the workman is wise he will try, before turning to the desperate alternative of a politically controlled industry, an entirely new method with the present system, entirely new, at least, in this generation he will try what loyal co-operation with his employers can achieve to make the present system more successful. He will exchange suspicion for faith, active disloyalty for co-operation, dishonest work for honest work, and sensible brotherhood for irrational class hatred. That is to say, he will put his shoulder, not to the political wheel in the interest of politicians who prey upon him, but to the industrial wheel in the interest of industrialists who provide him with his daily bread, and in the interest of his family and his native land.

And he may do this even if he still cherishes the ideal of a Socialistic State, and feels his blood grow bitter in his veins at the sight of so much suffering in the slums and so much selfish folly in the lives of the Rich; for it will be easier to carry out the whole dream of the Socialist in a time of rich prosperity than it will be possible to effect even the least of social reforms in a time of industrial ruin. No man who can think at

all would prefer to take over a bankrupt and a broken business, when the opportunity is open to him of taking over a business in the full flood of prosperity I am quite certain that even Mr. Jack Jones of Silver-town would wonder if his powers were adequate to reconstructing the happiness of the British people from the ruins of the British Empire And I am also equally sure that if revolution brought the British Empire to ruin there is no man on earth, whatever his political opinions or his genius for organisation, who could ever again make room in these little islands for forty millions of people.

Let me assure the worker, however great and just his moral indignation against the many evils of the present time, that his political thinking stands as urgently in need of order as the minds of the selfish Rich stand in need of moral discipline It is a dangerous state for any nation to find itself in, when its leisured class is frivolous, unmindful of its duties, and without any impetus towards creative satisfactions ; but it is more than a dangerous state for any nation to find itself in, when its working classes listen to a lunatic's burlesque of economic law and

plunge a crowbar of violent stupidity into the delicate mechanism which feeds them with daily bread

When from time to time I read in the newspapers of some disgraceful "rag" by young men in the centre of London, and learn how, with pulses quickened and courage inflamed by an unusual quantity of alcohol, they destroyed property and defied all the decencies of civilised life in a mad burst of mob violence, I remind myself that individually they are, for the most part, modest, temperate, and studious boys, who would no more dream of defying a policeman or pulling the nose of a commissionaire than they would think of entering the drawing-rooms of their mothers in a state of drunkenness, or smashing up the dolls' houses of their younger sisters.

And so, too, I remind myself when I read the violent speeches of political agitators, or the account of some suicidal strike over a trivial matter which ought not to disturb the equanimity of a child, that the average British workman, in his private capacity, is a decent person, who acknowledges the moral law, does the best he can for his wife and children, and is not without a

quiet pride in what Henry James called, while he was still an American, "the great name of England" Of this I remind myself, and I know that if left to himself, and relying on his better instincts and his higher nature, he will yet save the country from the catastrophe which threatens its existence But when I think of him as a passive unit in a vast multitude swayed by the wild rhetoric of an untrained mind or an indignant dreamer, I fear him more, far more, than I should fear the young men of the present generation were they to permit some crack-brained Lord of Misrule to organise their numbers into a guerrilla force of Sein Feiners or to drill their ranks into an army of black-shirted Fascisti

No State can endure in which great masses of men and women shut their eyes to the plain conditions of their economic existence, and allow the mental invalids of the nation to drive them forward like a flock of sheep or a herd of swine For it is of the very essence of human life, since only in human life has evolution achieved the great miracle of Personality, that each man should be responsible for his own salvation, and should himself make the deliberate choice between



Brain and Belly, or, in other words, between Truth and Error.

Man was born in a herd, and from the beginning of time men have sought for some principle which would make herd existence tolerable to the human spirit. We can trace this notion from Plato's *Republic*, and through Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, or William Morris's *Nowhere*, down to Lenin's Bolshevism and Mussolini's Fascism. It is, of course, the central notion of Roman Catholic governance, and every Church which has protested against Rome has yet imitated her in this respect—the Methodists by their tea-parties, the Salvation Army by a uniform, and various Brotherhoods by their "Pleasant Sunday Afternoons," Bands of Hope, and other forms of social association. Everywhere man would save his brothers by uniting them in a body and governing their lives by a herd principle. The Socialist is nothing more than an economic cattle drover.

But, obviously, evolution's main achievement is personality in man, and personality can function only as an intensely individual thing. It is by escaping from the herd that man ceases to be an animal and becomes a living soul. A schoolmaster does not pass

a whole class a class is examined to decide individual merit, and each boy stands or falls by his own achievements. Nature is plainly seeking not for races and nations, or even for trade-unions and Socialist Sunday-schools, but for individuals, and if there is a heaven to make reasonable this majestic labour of evolution, it would seem impossible to believe that we shall enter it in batches, like processions of the unemployed, each with its own banners, and its band playing—members of the Church of England's Men's Society, followed by the Black Shirts of Italy, teachers in Socialist Sunday-schools marching between members of the Anti-Vivisection Society and battalions of Sein Feiners.

One may even see enormous dangers in organised aggregations of the human species, and believe that the most urgent of the soul's duties at the present time is to break away from every form of association, be it religious or political, and vigorously to decide with its own conscience how it should carry on its commerce with God and Man.

I am acquainted with many clergymen whose minds appear to me to be not only well furnished with knowledge but also illuminated by the most beautiful charity;

yet, when I read of a Church Congress, or of any organised proceedings concerning such a matter as prayer-book revision, I find that clergymen *en bloc* and in the mass are as fiercely intolerant as any Hindu priest, and apparently as unenlightened concerning the work of scholarship as a negro missionary in the United States. It is the same, too, with Labour Conferences: the intelligent reformer who delights us at the fireside, and who is generous in his judgments and careful in his statements when we get him to ourselves, is transformed in the atmosphere of organisation and political gregariousness into a sounding Lenin and a tinkling Trotsky.

Herman Melville in *Moby Dick* suggests in a memorable way that the soul can only reach its true atmosphere when it breaks free from the touch of humanity and searches out the midmost ocean of solitude.

“I looked with sympathetic awe and fearfulness upon the man, who in midwinter just landed from four years’ dangerous voyage, could so unrestingly push off for still another tempestuous term. It fared with him as with the storm-tossed ship that miserably drives along the leeward land. The port would fain give succour,

the port is pitiful; in the port is safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that's kind to our mortalities. But in that gale, the port, the land, is that ship's direst jeopardy. She must fly all hospitality, one touch of land, though it but graze the keel, would make her shudder through and through.

"Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth, that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore

"But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God—so, better it is to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety."

Safety, comfort, hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends—these things stand for Churches and Trade-Unions, and for Bolshevism and Fascism; but Personality, if it is to reach the full stature of its spiritual manhood, must regard these things as "treacherous" and "slavish," must fly all hospitality, and seek the highest truth of existence in its own loneliness—that highest truth which is "shoreless, indefinite as

God"—ever keeping the open independence of her sea

"Older is the pleasure in the herd," says Nietzsche, "than the pleasure in the ego, and as long as the good conscience is for the herd, the bad conscience only saith *ego*. Verily the crafty ego, the loveless one, that seeketh its advantage in the advantage of the many—it is not the origin of the herd, but its ruin."

The workers, as regards their economic affairs, may find it necessary to form themselves into unions, and those unions may still render them many and great services. But they can only be their true servants if every member composing them makes full use of his intelligence to see that their power is used in a rational and moral way, and feels that he himself is individually responsible for their corporate actions and individually free from their official inquisitions. To let himself be used as a battering-ram by any visionary with a trick of speech and a mastery of ferocious gesture is not only ignoble but highly dangerous. The workers of this country are responsible beings, and they must act as responsible beings, not only in their homes and in their workshops,

but also in their unions To listen to men who use hatred as a weapon, and confuse might with right, and whose whole business it is to create discontent and to act as a disruptive force in the economic life of the nation—to listen to such men in the belief that they are the inspired and disinterested prophets of millennium is to confess oneself unworthy of a mind and incapable of using reason

Is not Nietzsche's contemptuous description of the agitator, the *actor* as he would call him, worthy of a worker's thought? "To upset—that meaneth with him to prove To drive mad—that meaneth with him to convince. And blood is counted by him as the best of all arguments . . . Full of chattering buffoons is the market-place,—and the people glory in their great men! These are for them the masters of the hour. But the hour presseth them."

If the workers would put away suspicion and enter into intelligent co-operation with those who are responsible for the organisation of British industry, showing such a spirit of loyalty and patriotism in the national dilemma as our soldiers showed in the trenches of war, they would, in my

judgment, not only better their own conviction immeasurably, but create such a public opinion in the nation as would shame the worst of the Rich out of their selfish and anti social ways. Perhaps it is in no small measure because the Rich have come to think of the worker as a man who never considers the interests of his country, and who is for ever on the loose-out to hold the whole nation up to ransom for the sake of a few pence at the week's end, that the best of them have lost their sense of aristocratic duty and the weakest elements among them have turned to a life of dreary excitement and destructive self-indulgence.

For if a little aristocracy, faithful to its traditions, and inspired by a noble conception of human life could lead our nation from feudalism to freedom, how much more should a faithful and devoted multitude of workers be able to shame a small plutocracy out of its anti-social absurdities and its intellectual childishness?

Why should we doubt the vision of Dostoevsky? "It will come to pass, that even the most corrupt of our Rich will end by being ashamed of his riches before the Poor, and the Poor, seeing his humility, will understand and give way before him, will

respond joyfully and kindly to his honourable shame ”

After all, we are only at a stage in the history of man's progress from animal instincts to spiritual truth. And as men make new discoveries in the field of natural law, so must we hope to discover new and greater commands in the field of moral law.



## I

ALL the disorders at which we have glanced in the foregoing pages are symptoms of wrong thinking. Wrong thinking, it should be seen, is not to be confused with what Talleyrand called "the Englishman's prerogative of ignorance." It is rather a confusion of values, a tendency to lay our emphasis on something which is not important, and to overlook entirely a matter which is vital to right living.

It remains to be discovered whether there is a single source of this dangerous wrong thinking, one false premiss in the individual mind which leads to various illogical and disastrous consequences in the national existence.

I venture to suggest that the lazy and unconscientious agnosticism of modern times is responsible, more than any other single cause, for the general confusion of our national existence. This is to say, that we

are living in a haphazard and disorderly fashion because we have not troubled to settle with ourselves the first question of all intelligent action, the supreme reason and purpose of our being

Agnosticism is the result in the average mind of two separate causes, one a traditional theology which has lost touch with the conscience of mankind, and the other a shallow and very contagious philosophy based upon the supposed findings of physical science

The average man, ceasing to believe in miracles, ceases to trouble himself about the mysteries of religion, quoting with grateful approval the cynical definition of faith,—that power by which we believe things which we know to be false. On the other hand, without giving himself the trouble to think things out for himself, he readily accepts the current notion, in all its grotesque falsity, that physical science can account for every phenomenon of the universe, without recourse of any kind to what he terms the supernatural

The whole trend of an industrial civilisation lends itself to this corrupting and destructive agnosticism, for not only does it

imprison the mind of man in the artificial conditions of overcrowded and depressing cities, but it also narrows his attention to the purely economic ends of social existence. The trade union leader becomes a greater person than the philosopher, and a political agitator takes the place in the affections of mankind which was once occupied by the prophet

Also, because the strain of an industrial civilisation is so exhausting, the pleasures of the averageman become less and less formative and more and more elemental. He cannot be bothered to admire what is beautiful, or to consider what is intellectually enlightening. To the places of amusement which he frequents he carries none of the higher faculties of the human spirit, but only those cruder instincts and emotions which he shares with the lower animals. To forget his domestic troubles and his economic difficulties, to escape from the monotony of his factory or his shop, to live for a few hours in an atmosphere which is supplied to him in childhood by the fairy-tale or the pantomime, he goes to the absurdities of the picture theatre, the sexual attractions of the ballet and revue, or to the easy ecstasy of alcohol

Nor does religion challenge this destructive way of living with any power of living reality. It places itself in a sympathetic—sometimes a sycophantic—attitude, and pleads with the average man chiefly for his patronage of certain tenets and various traditional ceremonies which it considers are essential to salvation in another world. It never denounces agnosticism as a dishonest synonym for atheism, nor does it proclaim religion as a perfectly natural activity of the soul without which there can be no health in mind or body.

Therefore, it has come about that the great masses of our countrymen have lost all sense of mystery and now live like the animals whose consciousness has never been disturbed by a sense of kinship with the universe. The spirit within them, starved of its nutriment, flags and withers. They look upon a world which has no message for them, and the only whisperings of conscience which attract their notice are those inspired by the passing of a policeman or the shadow of a prison wall. They neither wonder nor trouble. They never experience the profound rapture of contemplation or the awe of worship. The whole

region of religion remains outside the radius of their experience

Now it is manifest that if men do not seriously consider with themselves why they are in the world and what is the nature of their relation to the creative forces of the universe, they must blunder their ways. For this, clearly, is the first step of an intelligent life, to know the conditions of its being and to ascertain the end for which it was created.

Let me again quote the admirable Shaftesbury

“Where are we? Under what Roof? Or on board what Vessel? Whither bound? On what Business? Under whose Pilotship, Government, or Protection?—are questions which every sensible Man would naturally ask, if he were on a sudden transported into a new scene of life.” Yet in the matter which relates most immediately to ourselves, and is our chief self-interest, we remain indifferent, and “to be bubbled or put upon by any sham Advices in this Affair, is, it seems, of no consequence!”

The first step to be taken from the destroying indifference of agnosticism towards an intelligent appreciation of our true

place in creation is to confront, until we realise it as an overwhelming fact, the mystery of the universe into which we are born, with our own individual share of that mystery in the form of self-conscious personality

That we have lost the sense of awe and wonder out of which have emerged all the religions, arts, and sciences of civilisation is apparent enough to anyone who studies the present situation. It might seem indeed, to a visitor from another sphere, that we ourselves had created the heavens and the earth, that we ourselves did the ordering of the seasons, and that in our eyes there was nothing more wonderful or awe-inspiring in the majestical universe than a mechanic could find in a motor-car or a potter in a tea-cup. We do not behave ourselves as tenants of the earth, but rather as its ground landlords. We do not act as if we knew ourselves to be entirely dependent on invisible powers for the increase which comes of our sowing and watering, or for the laws which preserve the universe about us as a cosmos and not a chaos. No; we take everything for granted, and, far from experiencing any overwhelming sense of marvel and adoration, we are troubled

scarcely at all, by even a moment of becoming gratitude.

Agnosticism of a respectable kind can advance honourable reasons for its abstention from the somewhat narrow sphere of clericalism, but the fashionable agnosticism of the time, which is nothing more respectable than insolent flippancy, does not even bother its flurried brains to justify by one semblance of a reason or one shadow of an excuse its contempt for the whole region of religion.

It is not an agnosticism which says, "The facts before me are insufficient for a dogma; I do not know enough about the universe to say whether it is the creation of a Mind, or about history to decide whether Christianity is a truer theory of existence than Buddhism or Hinduism." It is rather an agnosticism which flings over a half-turned contemptuous shoulder when challenged for its behaviour towards religion the impatient explanation, "I don't want to be bothered by anything I can't understand. Religion is a superstition. God is a bogey. Death is the end. If I am wrong in these conclusions, what does it matter? I never asked to be born. I have no desire to go to heaven when I die. There is plenty enough trouble in the world

already, without adding to it by making people miserable about their souls I am here only for a little time, and I intend to enjoy myself ”

This indifference to the very ground of our being and to the setting of our existence is atheism, and it is not called atheism only because it refrains, in its disdain, from attacking religion. It is called agnosticism, is treated by the Church with a measure of respect, and is left freely to propagate itself in a world which is more and more organising life for animal enjoyments. Therefore our condition tends to become disturbingly godless, and the immemorial sanctions of morality, the mysterious *Ought* in man's soul which has hitherto urged him out of selfishness, lose their power. It is not the absurd edicts of Bolshevism, or the feverish teachings of the Socialist Sunday School, which are creating a godless humanity, but the exclusion from our industrial and economic civilisation of all sense of mystery.

Without this sense of mystery in the soul there can be no true approach to reality, and no lasting dignity in the conduct of society. Man as an animal must revert to



the herd instinct, and in that condition individualism will wane and personality will perish

In other words, unless we begin all our thinking with the idea of God, and educate in ourselves a feeling of dependence on spiritual powers for our true growth, and consciously acknowledge our responsibility to God for all our thoughts and actions, we can never live intelligently in an intelligent universe, nor fare prosperously in a world which is founded upon a moral basis.

## II

ANOTHER common example of wrong thinking is seen in the attitude of men who insist that art and morals are two different things. A distinguished writer has lately laid down this proposition with an air of finality, although he proceeds to argue that a work of art which is immoral should be burned.

To say that art and morals are two different things is as if a man should say that a rose is a different thing from a flower-bed, or that the sea is a different thing from the land, or that the earth is a different thing from the sun.

Moral law is as absolutely foundational to social life as natural law to physical existence. It is as impossible for us to think of human life without the postulates of Right and Wrong, Truth and Error, Higher and Lower as it is for us to think of physical existence without the postulates of length and breadth, air and water, heat and cold, day and night. If we attempt to think of human life as a thing with no

relation to moral law, we are no more guilty of absurdity, and no less likely to escape retribution, than the man who attempts to live as if his lungs are independent of pure air and his digestion of wholesome food

“ this is why ‘moral’ stupidity involves far-reaching intellectual blindness” (says Dr. Bosanquet) “It is because the ‘moral’ system is the centre and foundation of the mind’s whole structure and habits, and if we are blind to the order and harmony of the former, it means that we are ignorant in a great measure of the facts and truths which belong to the latter. We are ignoring what a mind and life must be, at the minimum, in order to have value at all as a life and mind ”

The ultimate stupidity, he teaches, is to desert the path of life according to moral principle. The mind of an evil man, he says, “ is confused throughout and shattered by pervading discrepancies and conflicts with itself, and is wholly incapable of conceiving or of portraying an orderly life in wholesome relations with man and nature.”

If we narrow moral stupidity, he says, into the very narrowest import, meaning blindness to such values as are implied

in the second half of the Decalogue, we shall find that it involves an enormous intellectual disability

“The man who lacks control of his passions ‘does not study the most important things’ So Xenophon bluntly reproduces what he thinks he heard from Socrates And Plato, towards the end of his life, though far from abandoning the old doctrine that ‘knowledge is virtue,’ nevertheless restated it once at least in a way which betrayed, as I think, an emphatic secret and certainty which for him it contained

“At all events, he seems to tell us that whether knowledge is virtue or not, virtue at any rate is knowledge It does not matter, he says, how ‘scientific’ you may be, or how expert and rapid in reasoning, if you live well, by the simple laws of honour and justice, you are wise, and if you live otherwise, all the science and reasoning in the world will not save you from having admitted into your mind a supreme discord, which is the ultimate and superlative stupidity Your intellect proper may in such a case be a fine-looking growth, but is rotten at the root ”

If the reader is in any doubt of what the simple laws of morality are, I would suggest to him not to confuse his mind with the

subtle distinctions of philosophers, but to reduce the difficulty of all ethics to terms of practical common sense, as Milton did when he so memorably solved the wordy dispute about free-will with the phrase, "Reason is but choosing"

Morals are but growth They are growth from the lower nature of man to his higher nature They are the recognition of his soul that there is a lower and a higher in life, and the knowledge that when his reason chooses the lower he does ill, and when it chooses the higher he does right.

The whole story of evolution is an epic of development, the record of a change from bad to better, of a choice of good instead of bad, and of a movement from error to truth. Not to see this fact is to be blind; not to acknowledge it is to be bad.

No one doubts that an honest lawyer is a better creature than a dishonest lawyer, or that a doctor who tries to heal his patients is a higher creature than the doctor who poisons his. No one entertains a doubt that a temperate man is a better man than a sot, or that a pure woman is a better woman than a strumpet No one in his senses would prefer for his friend a man who cheats at cards, steals when he is unob-

served, gets drunk at the table, and insults the women of the household, to a man who is honourable in all his ways, clean in all his habits, and able to discuss the problems of life with reason and good taste.

The trouble only appears when we lose sight of the essential moral character of existence, and the tremendous moral responsibility of the individual, and so come to think that a picture or a book which is technically well painted or technically well written, but the influence of which is immoral, can escape the righteous censure of a just mind on account of its artistic qualities. Everything, however simple, which helps men to ascend, is good, and everything, however magnificent, which lowers man's moral vitality, is bad.

If we think of the history of the universe as a jest, or as a matter too mighty for our understanding, we shall be wrong in all our thinking, but if we think of it as a tremendous act of Mind, and, contemplating life, "recognise and attend to its solid moral basis with faith in its serious work and purpose," then, however humble our lives, and however small our contribution to the progress of mankind, we shall at least be thinking rightly, and so we shall not merely

escape the retribution which falls upon all error, but shall find ourselves growing at the centre of our being into a higher happiness and a keener responsiveness to spiritual truth.

### III

From these propositions—namely, that the mystery of existence claims our attention with a merciful purpose, and that awe and reverence are essential to our dignity and our safety, and that the essential basis of human existence is moral—it should be a comparatively simple proceeding to develop a thesis of life agreeable to the reason and conscience of mankind

Without such a thesis, let us be very certain, it is no more possible to live a rational life, or to organise a community of people, than it is for a man to build a comfortable house out of the materials for a gas-balloon, or for a surgeon to conduct a successful operation with the idea in his head that he is playing a Prelude by Chopin

After all, the sewing woman knows what she would make before she begins to use needle and thread, the golfer on the tee understands perfectly well what he would do before he sets about swinging his club,



and the engineer has a plan in his mind when he begins to invent a new tool for an automatic lathe

Therefore it is manifest that to live rationally in the world men must formulate to themselves as distinct a thesis as possible of the nature of existence and the ends they should pursue

But this, I maintain, is what men seldom do, and the whole purpose of my book is to suggest that it is precisely because men will not formulate an intelligent thesis of existence that our social life presents such a chaos of misery, and our political life such a chaos of disordered thinking

The answer that will be given to me, I suppose, is that no thesis can be formulated on which all men would agree, that the history of man is little more than a struggle to establish one rival thesis on the wreckage of another; and that it is, therefore, safer for humanity to treat existence as an open question and to include the ends of its social, political, and economic life in the decent agnosticism with which it prevents the fanaticisms of religion from disturbing the peace of the world and the politeness of dinner-tables

My reply to such an objector is the simple one that a thesis which would attempt to account for all the mysteries of the universe is an absurdity—and hence the failure of every dogmatic theology from the beginning of time, but that a thesis which limits itself to providing an intelligent purpose for human activity is not only possible, but is necessary to the further progress of mankind “If the goal of humanity be still lacking, is there not also still lacking humanity itself?” Moreover, I think it is possible to formulate such a thesis without trespassing on the ground of the theologian, and without arousing the suspicion of the democracy that it is being either gulled or preached at

Concerning life it is possible to make with certainty two very important affirmations First, that it is a thing that moves Second, that its movement is from lower to higher Whatever we choose to think about the hypotheses of philosophy and the creeds of religion, these two qualities of life are among those facts which Shaftesbury called stubborn things, and which will not be as we fancy 'em, or as the Fashion varies, but as they stand in Nature

In the creatures about us life appears to have reached its extremity, so far as those forms are concerned. We do not expect to see the elephants producing their Hercules, or the butterflies their Aphrodite, or the woodpeckers their Giling Gibbons. No man in his senses imagines that one day a whale will lift its head from the ocean wearing anything comparable to the telephone receivers of the British Broadcasting Company, or that a traveller in Africa will some day come upon a hippopotamus smiling over the pages of *Alice in Wonderland*. Whatever intelligence may be developed in domesticated animals, it is safe to prophesy that five hundred years hence every bear will be very like the bear which came out of the wood and devoured the children who mocked Elisha, and every spider very like the spider which spun its web in sight of Robert Bruce.

With man, however, it is an altogether different matter. He changes as he travels through time, and changes so fundamentally that his experiences may be described as the Complete History of Change, or rather a History of Change to be completed, like Mr. H. G. Wells's heroic effort at universal

history, in several fortnightly parts The very gods whom man has set up and de-throned are to be numbered by hundreds At one moment he is trembling in an excess of terror before his frightening idol and at the next laughing at it for a most palpable and ridiculous lie At one moment he is burning his neighbour for declaring that the world is not a plane and does not stand still, at the next he is locking up in a lunatic asylum the man who denies that it is a sphere and that it moves round the sun. Aristotle believed that food is digested in the lungs; Sir Robert Peel that all the world would adopt a policy of free imports

Whether we are going forward to greater happiness or to greater misery may be a disputable matter, but it is certainly indisputable that we are going forward, and that it is, indeed, impossible to conceive of human life without both movement and change We cannot stand still We cannot prevent our brains from thinking and our hands from moving It is the very quality and nature of the human mind that it should break away from what is past and journey onward to a world of ideas different from that which it inherits from the partial knowledge of its ancestors Men like Plato,

Isaac Newton, Darwin, and Pasteur make a profound difference in the general life of humanity, and no man, without doing violence to his reason, can now think of the physical universe as Socrates, Galileo, and even Newton thought of it.

Now, it is clear that to move intelligently we must acquaint ourselves with the circumstances of human life and the conditions of movement. We must tell ourselves, for example, that we must expect no supernatural deliverer when we trip up or fall into the pit of error. We must accept the moral law which governs our existence, whether we like it or not. And we must courageously confront the manifest fact of all human experience that there is no forgiveness for a broken law. We are meant to be careful, and nature is intended to hurt us when we affront her.

No man will object to believing that if he puts his head into a gas oven the fumes will not be converted into attar of roses, or the taps turned off, by some supernatural agency. No man, either, will dispute that intemperance in the matter of drinking breaks a law the punishment for which is serious damage of the tissues, or that a person who spends his life in cheating and

stealing from his neighbour cannot escape in his character the depraving consequences of such a career. Nor will any man argue that an expression of repentance on his part, however sincere, can remove from his body the effects of some hideous and disfiguring poison incurred by vicious self-indulgence.

From this acceptance of the conditions of his life it should not be difficult for a man to decide that one of his clearest duties is to educate his intelligence. He is a creature that moves, and the path along which he moves is strewn with dangers. No one but himself can deliver him from those dangers. On his own wit he must rely if he is to reach his destination in safety. Manifestly he must be vigilant and sober, as vigilant and sober as a man driving a high-powered car through a dark night in a strange country, and, manifestly too, he must have some clear idea in his mind as to the destination of his journey.

Here he must consult with life. From forms so low as to be scarcely conscious, life has become in him an energy that is not only vitally self-conscious but has assumed the mysterious characteristic of Personality. This is the infinitely greatest achievement

of evolution, self-conscious Personality ; but if he ask life whether it is the end, and whether with him finishes all the long agonies and joys of an immemorial creation, he will certainly be told that life is not yet satisfied, that it is still pressing forward

Therefore he will comprehend that he is expected to help, according to his measure, a work that is still in process of construction, and that only two courses are open to him, either to be a good workman of evolution or a bad one. He cannot decide to be neither the one nor the other. He is a creature that moves, and either his mind is going forward to the future, thus helping evolution, or backward to the past, thus hindering evolution.

When he asks what it means to travel forward, he is told that it means to desire and to strive after excellence. When he asks what it means to travel backward, he is told that it means to be careless about anything which strengthens human character. And he is further told that no man can travel alone. He drags humanity back with him when he surrenders to any inclinations of his lower nature, he helps humanity forward when he strives to be a nobler creature. The demand

that evolution makes of him, then, is to get his table of values right for himself and for others, and to act upon them with decisive strength and all the intelligence of a moral being

He is to choose truth instead of ignorance, courage instead of cowardice, temperance instead of sensuality, faith instead of doubt, hope instead of despair, keenness instead of slackness. He is to make his decision between things seen and things unseen, between the trough and character, between greed and generosity, between pettiness and greatness. And no thought of rewards and punishments is to enter his mind. He is to choose truth, goodness, and beauty because they are higher than error, badness, and ugliness—because they are desirable in his eyes, because he hungers for them as a lion for his food, and because he can see nothing to love and nothing to demand his service in those things which are false, evil, and repulsive

The character of virtue is best seen, I think, in the life of an intellectual man devoted to the service of truth. Baron Friedrich von Hugel has summed up the virtues of such a man in the following words



“ . candour, moral courage, intellectual honesty, scrupulous accuracy, chivalrous fairness, endless docility to facts, disinterested collaboration, unconquerable hopefulness and perseverance, manly renunciation of popularity and easy honours, love of bracing labour and strengthening solitude ”

These virtues give to the man of science a dignity and a grandeur which no one even looks to see in the artist, in the popular novelist, or the fashionable painter who trades upon the baser appetites of the mob, or in the booming journalist engaged in shouting down truth and beauty, who would certainly regard “ endless docility to facts ” as a sign of weakness

Listen to Emerson's famous account of moral laws immanent in nature .

“ These laws execute themselves They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance Thus, in the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire He who does a good deed is instantly ennobled He who does a mean deed is by the action itself contracted He who puts off impurity thereby puts on purity If a man dissemble, deceive, he deceives himself, and goes out

of acquaintance with his own being. Character is always known. Thefts never enrich, alms never impoverish, murder will speak out of stone walls. The least admixture of a lie—for example, the taint of vanity, any attempt to make a good impression, a favourable appearance—will instantly vitiate the effect. But speak the truth, and all things alive or brute are vouchers, and the very roots of the grass underground there do seem to stir and move to bear your witness. For all things proceed out of the same spirit, which is differently named love, justice, temperance, in its different applications, just as the ocean receives different names on the several shores which it washes.”

We can see plainly enough, when we attend to the matter, the difference between virtue and vice, but what the generality of mankind fails to perceive is the tremendous necessity of the one and the quite inexpressible danger of the other. If scrupulous accuracy is essential to intellectual virtue, moral carelessness of any kind must be fatal to the health of a soul or to the life of a nation. Doubt in this matter is only possible to a mind which has never attended to truth, and never considered the record of human history.

Let a man once ask of life what it expects of him, and he will be told in no uncertain voice that he is to love with all his might those things which purify and exalt his soul, and to hate with all his might those things which weaken and degrade his soul

In that answer, and it is the only answer life gives to the intelligent mind that asks it, we have our thesis of human existence To live rationally is to aspire Reason is but choosing, and the only choosing for right reason is the higher life of the human race In other words, life is growth—a growing away from what is imperfect, and a growing towards what is perfect; a growing away from what is false, discordant, and disruptive, and a growing towards what is true, harmonious, and complete And the friends of humanity may easily be seen if we apply to them this simple and conclusive test of the character of their growth

Apply it fearlessly, for it is our safest measure and standard, to the recreations of the Rich and the recreations of the Poor, apply it to the painter and the architect, to the theatre and the newspaper, to the politician and the schoolmaster. By this standard judge of the manners of mankind, their morals, and their pursuits. Measure

the bookmaker and the come actor by this standard, as well as the behaviour of the Rich in their cabarets and the behaviour of the Poor in their gin-palaces. Let no exceptions or excuses corrupt your judgment, for every man, whether it be by his wisdom or his wit, by his daily work or his casual words, is either helping humanity forward or dragging it backward. And if the one man be a friend, the other is an enemy.

We may assert with no fear of a wrong judgment that if he who is not decisively on the side of Goodness is the enemy of mankind, then he who does not perceive it to be his duty to be on the side of Goodness is a fool.

But simple and incontrovertible as this proposition seems to be, it must be pondered deeply and conscientiously in the mind if it is to save us from chaos—moral, economic, and political. For it reveals to us the disconcerting, nay, but the alarming, fact that until a great majority of men (since we live in a time of government by public opinion) is earnestly carrying on the struggle of moral evolution, our entire life, political and economic, ethical and æsthetic, must be at the hazard of anarchy.

So that to all men capable of seeing truth, and of realising the perils of evolution, it must surely appear that no lip-service in the cause of man's moral life can suffice to save us from disaster, but that all who love Goodness and hate Evil must make themselves soldiers of civilisation and "argonauts of the ideal."

And certainly ought this truth to appear with commanding force to those who plainly see, surveying the present condition of England, how all her ancient standards are degraded, how the worst enemies of mankind have swarmed into her chief places, and how her multitudes, preyed upon by a sordid commercialism, are left with no guides save the mass-thinkers—the pedagogic socialist and the atheistical revolutionist, both enemies of the individual soul.

A low moral vitality at the top, discontent and political confusion below, the individual man losing more and more his sense of gratitude for the past and responsibility for the future, no real sense of unity and brotherhood in the nation, no feeling anywhere of duty, or consciousness of direction, and no enthusiasm for the greatest empire known to the whole history of mankind—if this be the state of

England's mind, how can she escape the retribution which must needs fall upon blindness of heart and lassitude of soul?

Truly must all who know how great a part she has played in the civilisation of the world desire to see in her, at this perilous moment, signs that she has heard the voice of her own greatest son bidding her—

“Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,”

he who warned her that—

“delays have dangerous ends,”

“And many strokes, though with a little axe,  
Hew down and fell the hardest-timber'd oak”

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